



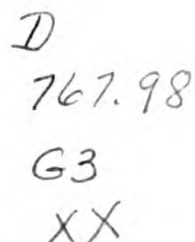
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# On Valor's Side





T. GRADY GALLANT

# On Valor's Side

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To my daughter, Lacy, and to my two  
sons, Thomas and Scott . . . and to my  
wife, Micheal Ann . . . to all of whom  
this was in "Olden Times," but for  
whom it was worth it.





On valor's side the odds of combat lie,  
The brave live glorious, or lamented die;  
The wretch who trembles in the field of fame,  
Meets death, and worse than death, eternal shame!

*The Iliad:* Book V



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# Foreword

The First Division, Fleet Marine Force, United States Marine Corps, was the first American fighting unit in World War II to launch a successful land assault against this nation's enemies. The First Division's invasion of the Solomon Islands, of which Guadalcanal is a part, took place on the morning of August 7, 1942. The action was a long, cruel holding operation fought with too little equipment and support, and too few men. There was not enough food and ammunition. For long periods, beginning at the very outset of the assault, the Japanese had domination of the vast sea surrounding the islands and the endless stretch of air above them.

During the course of the battle, which was to become one of the great landmarks in American arms—and which for the Marines lasted through the middle of December 1942—the Japanese brought to bear a variety of weapons seldom faced before in history—if ever—by ground troops of a single unit. Not only was the First Division bombed by large squadrons of high-flying aircraft during the daylight hours, the Marines were subjected to night bombing, to strafing by Japanese fighter planes, and to bombardment by battleships, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and land artillery, in addition to attack by conventional tanks and infantry weapons day in and day out, night by night, during the almost five months they held the island before being relieved by Army units.

On many occasions, units of the Japanese Navy cruised in broad daylight to fire upon the Marines, and many times re-

inforcements to Japanese units were landed while the Americans looked on, helpless to prevent the operation. Sea battles between American and Japanese naval units were witnessed by troops ashore, submarines were sunk in daylight before their eyes, and they watched their own vessels attacked and destroyed by the enemy. Dogfights between aircraft were staged above their heads, and often planes crashed only a few yards away from their foxholes.

There was no rear area in the sense of a safe place on Guadalcanal, for the invasion force was for many weeks under a grim and relentless siege, cut off from effective help, eating captured Japanese supplies and smoking Japanese cigarettes. The Marines lived in holes in the ground, for the most part. Those who slept in tents had to run for bomb shelters at least once a night, and, sometimes, it was easier to sleep there than be constantly awakened by air-raid alarms.

By the time it was relieved by Army units, the First Marine Division held something of a record, up to that date, for number of days under continuous fire by the enemy.

August 7, 1962 was the twentieth anniversary of this battle: the Battle for Guadalcanal . . . the Battle for the Solomons. There have been a number of books published concerning the conflict. Some of them saw print during the war; indeed, at least one came out while the struggle for the Solomons was still in progress. The Marine Corps has published works which include the Solomons Battle, and an excellent book, *The Old Breed*, has been done on the recent history of the First Marine Division.

But I know of no work by anyone—though there quite well may be one or more—on the Guadalcanal operation by an enlisted man who participated from beginning to end. I know of no book that tries to record the fears, the little moments of triumph and joy, the battlefield and life and death upon it. This book is an attempt to do this; it makes no pretense of being a technical work, quite the contrary. Indeed, the technician has more than his share of literature. This book is about ordinary Marines doing the job for which they have always been trained: attacking the enemy

and killing him. This book is not an account of personal heroics, for I am not a heroic person.

Though the Marines of the First Division did not know it at the time, they bridged the gap between World War I and World War II. In a way this was symbolized by the World War I equipment with which they fought. The lessons the First Division learned at Guadalcanal were applied at other fronts, often by members of "the old First" themselves.

This book, too, concerns itself with a war that was the last of its kind—for science has remade war into another and more terrible image. It speaks of a war that is as outmoded and ancient as any ever fought in the past, and of a battle that still could be easily compared with some fought during the American Civil War. This is a personal account, as true as I can make it, but subject to inaccuracies of memory even though that memory is supported by letters I wrote home from the battlefield and from other overseas areas, and clippings of articles and stories published in the United States while the battle was in progress. These letters and clippings were preserved for me by my mother, Louise Ralls Gallant, R.N., of Gadsden, Alabama, who has a sense of family history, and who felt her son was fighting the battle singlehanded.

Marines were not allowed to keep diaries or notes, and I kept none; thus, the records my mother preserved are of great value to me, and, I hope, will be to my children. But the experience of war does not require the combat Marine to need a diary to help him recall what he has seen and heard when life itself has become very, very precious to him . . . and when he truly believes its sands have run very low for him. Under such circumstances of great stress, of great doubts and fears, frights and moments of passion, the human mind is a sensitive and reliable instrument of memory. Most of the pages of this book are drawn from this prime source; it was the recorder that was there.

This book is as free of profanity as possible. Though the everyday language of the Corps is almost pure profanity, and the dialogue of battle is not that of the drawing room, I do not feel it necessary to write in this way to give you the true picture of

battle. The horrors of modern battle are in themselves enough to revolt those of a normal mind without the addition of words and phrases that I would not be proud for my children to read. I am not a prude on this matter; no one who has served more than four years in the Marine Corps is a prude. But I think there have been ample numbers of books dealing with the sex life of the military, which, as many know, differs little from that of the home front. And there have been uncouth volumes dealing with shore leave, bars, and bedrooms, and the dramatic experiences therein. However, the war was not fought in these places.

If there is a pattern to this book, it can be said it is that of some of the accounts written by men who fought in the Civil War; accounts written by common soldiers of that day and time. These insights into the lives and experiences of Civil War enlisted men seem to me to bring that great war closer to our generation than any other type record. As time goes on, they will become even more precious, for they tell of great historic times in simple language. They have never failed to convey to me a sense of kinship with the author, and when I have put them down, I have felt I knew what kind of man he was, his good points and his bad. The formal memoir of political and military leaders leaves something to be desired, if I may be so bold as to say so. The warmth of life is not in them; they are, many times, tedious. But the common fighting man lived through the hardships, and suffered them, in a more interesting way. There were so many *little things* that concerned him and were so vital to him and took up so much of his thought and time.

It is with these little things, and with the more important things, too, that this book deals. It is a record of a military way of life that is gone. The men involved were recruited—they were all volunteers for four years of service—by posters that appealed to patriotism, rather than to a “free education,” or job opportunities with “good pay.” They were in the Corps because they had gone to their local post offices and volunteered; they had proven they were high school graduates; they passed the physical, and they had lived through “boot camp.” They were in the Marine



Corps because they thought it was “rough” and “rugged” and the “best outfit” in the World—and for other reasons.

The Marine Corps was not an educational institution in the sense education is understood today. It was a fighting machine, and fighting was its sole reason for being. The men who joined expected to be educated only in fighting: how to kill with a rifle, how to kill with a bayonet, how to kill with a knife, how to kill with the bare hands, how to kill with explosives, cannons, machine guns, fire, wire, string, rope, clubs, sticks, and stones. And they expected to be taught how to get close enough to the enemy to do these things.

They just wanted to be Marines. And when they became Marines, they were proud, and were not ashamed.

If there is any real secret of the Marines, it is just that, nothing else. They are not ashamed.



# On Valor's Side



## BOOK ONE

# In the Beginning Was the Left Foot

*And the Dragon Stood  
before the woman  
which was ready to be delivered,  
for to devour her child  
as soon as it was born*

REVELATION 12:4



## CHAPTER ONE

### Sowing of the Dragon Seed

There was a general belief among enlisted Marines of World War II that, with the exception of Quantico, located near Washington, D.C., all Marine Corps installations were selected with only one objective in mind: to make the men stationed in them so miserable they would gladly go anywhere in the world to get away.

Marine camps, especially those occupied by the Fleet Marine Force, the assault arm of the Corps, were not designed for comfort. Such camps either were deep in a forest populated by excessively hungry insects, or were in bogs, marshes, tidelands, and mud holes. They were almost inaccessible, and invariably the nearest evidence of civilization was some hamlet that prided itself on its Blue Laws and services geared to the exact population of the town, and no one else. As the war progressed, in spite of everything the Marine Corps had been able to do in the past, it was forced to locate some camps within five miles of a highway, and occasionally it was possible to reach a city from these places in a matter of hours.

In 1941, Parris Island met the tests of isolation, insect population, remoteness, and undesirable climate, making it an ideal

training base, or "boot camp," as Marines call them. It had been a training ground since 1915 and had some ten square miles of land, exclusive of marsh and tidelands, which were eagerly acquired by the Corps during the World War I period. It was far from any city, being connected with Port Royal, a crossroads community, by a heavily guarded bridge, and a few miles from Beaufort, South Carolina, a town that had the charming air of decay so savored by archaeologists, but which is rarely detected in communities still above ground. The story at the time was that Beaufort was populated by a heavy proportion of retired Marine officers and noncommissioned ratings who did not have the funds to go any further. At any rate, it was one of those towns in which the residents kept to themselves and observed the world only through cracks in closed shutters. The business places of Beaufort and Port Royal closed at sundown and both were dreary, depressing, and lonely places.

As a boot camp, Parris Island was the answer to the wildest dream of the most exacting and rugged Marine general. It afforded a flat, sandy terrain of breath-taking desolation and tedium swept by winds of the Atlantic Ocean and surrounded by tidal channels and sloughs populated by large schools of vicious sharks—according to the drill instructors—and snakes. The island was bitterly cold in winter and a furnace in summer. Mosquitoes were fertile, large, abundant, and hungry. The almost constant winds carried sand and dust that penetrated arms and equipment in a most insidious way, especially since the slightest speck of dust on equipment meant immediate punishment for a boot.

The addition of a brick barracks prior to the outbreak of World War II was heralded as the entrance into a new age of housing, a field the Corps had neglected since the American Revolution. However, the ancient wooden barracks of World War I were still standing and in use when I arrived at Parris Island in September 1941. Recruits who could not be accommodated in these barracks were quartered in tents, where they slept on cots and under mosquito netting. On the island were



various arms ranges, bayonet courses, and drill fields, which are the fundamental tools of the Corps.

Boots were never allowed to leave the island. They were restricted; rather, they were confined. No prison guided its inmates with more personal attention than Parris Island. A boot could make no move, even to the head (or bathroom) without permission of the drill instructor. And this permission was seldom easily obtained. Any move—the word “move” is to be taken literally—not authorized by a command was punished.

It is doubtful the Marine Corps really understands its own training methods. They must have developed over the history of the Corps as gleanings from military organizations throughout the world, plus additions by Marine instructors who particularly hated both the Corps and mankind itself. There is a strong Oriental flavor to much of the Marine Corps training technique, which probably reflects the long years the Marines have manned Far Eastern posts, and all of it is designed to make the transition from peace to war almost unnoticeable. Though the softness of present society may be reflected in today's training methods (and may not), before World War II they were designed to weed out the boots with unsuspected physical weaknesses, the cowardly, and the misfits.

The central idea was that punishment brought out the best in the individual, profanity held attention, ridicule stirred men to greater effort, physical force was a quality of both mind and body, obedience was blind, and hatred was the first step toward pride. During boot camp training, these principles were relentlessly applied. They were applied under the burden of long, bitter hours of toil. They were applied in an environment in which each individual was utterly alone among strangers of all levels of society. They were applied by the drill instructors who were the gods of this place. It was they who caused it to rain upon the just and the unjust alike.

I enlisted for four years in the Marine Corps at Savannah, Georgia, on September 3, 1941. I had celebrated my twenty-first birthday on June 14, Flag Day, of that year, and the decision

I made to devote the next four years of my time to Marine service was my own. I have never quite understood what first attracted me to the Corps. I have never been one who seeks out fights, or who likes to be told what to do. I remember I saw a Marine coming out of a bar in Jacksonville, Florida, one time, and he appeared intoxicated enough to give the impression of carefree abandon. It impressed me. When I joined the Marines I was seventy-two and one-half inches tall and weighed 132 pounds; I had blue eyes and blond hair. I had been born in Gadsden, Alabama, but my parents had moved to Sanford, Florida, when I was five. From the age of nine, I had known the Great Depression, as distinguished from the usual depression we suffered, and from the age of thirteen I had worked in a grocery store on Saturdays. During summers, I worked when I could get a job. I gave half of my earnings to my parents. I earned one dollar on Saturdays for working from 6:00 A.M. until 2:00 A.M. Sundays. When Social Security became law, I earned ninety-nine cents. If I worked in the grocery during the summer, I earned \$15 a week. The manager, who was a nephew of the owner, earned \$25, according to gossip among the employees. He got married on it.

Economic conditions improved somewhat by the time I was graduated from Seminole High School. The following fall, I went to Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. It was a small school at that time, and I hated every minute I was there. It was not the fault of the university; I just didn't like the place. I have never appreciated Methodist doctrine. Emory is a Methodist school. Among other things, it trains Methodist preachers. One summer, I lived in a dormitory filled with embryonic theologs. My roommate and I were the only pre-med students in the building, occupying a cell on the second floor. We were observed with suspicious eyes by the other occupants, because we were seldom caught singing hymns in our room; indeed, we were seldom in our room at all.

Our next-door neighbor was training his voice for prayer. He would arise at dawn and pray, employing varying tones and ranges of voice used by preachers in conversing with God. I have never understood why they can't talk with Him in normal

tones, but most cannot. This young preacher would conduct his prayers at his window, and it seemed he must, on occasion, sit on the ledge, for his voice and its message filled our room. Each word was clear, eerie, and saturated with emotion.

One particularly dreary morning for my roommate and me, our neighbor was at his window as usual. Kenneth and I had headaches, as we had come in exceptionally late from a medical school dance. We had friends in medical school and we were often invited to these functions, which were celebrated for the fact that all hands were completely shot down and staggering at their conclusion. They were very wearying. On this day, we were worn out; dazed and weak. We were awakened by this student preacher conducting an exceedingly loud and dull exorcism in a voice that grated on our raw nerves.

"I can't stand much of this," Kenneth, my roommate, groaned.

I opened bloodshot eyes and looked into a deep blue world. "It has got to be stopped," I replied weakly.

"Oh, Lord, what can I do to serve Thee?" the young preacher cried out the window, possibly from a perch on the ledge, and the words in deep, sweet tones, flowed over us like thick syrup.

"This is the Lord," Kenneth shouted from his bed. The prayer was cut in mid-cry, suspended in breathless silence. "I have received thy message, now shut up."

There was silence.

"I shouldn't have done that," Kenneth said to me. "It was wrong, you know."

We thought this over.

"It was all for the best," I said finally. "We have stood it for all these weeks. What if we had shouted biology out the window at sunrise every morning?"

"You're right. He should talk privately," Kenneth agreed.

We got up, dressed and went to breakfast. The coffee was good; we couldn't eat anything. By noon we were feeling better. For the remainder of the summer, the young preacher either prayed silently, or at some other window. He never awakened us again. Neither my roommate nor I ever felt right about our

handling of the situation. We felt sorry we had stopped him, sometimes.

At Emory I had wanted to become a doctor; I looked forward to seeing what was inside people. In my spare time in Florida, I dissected snakes and an occasional rabbit. We shot rabbits for food, and sometimes quail, as we lived in a bird sanctuary. The sanctuary was on an island, surrounded by interconnecting lakes, and it attracted a type of crane. It was a pretty bird that stood on long legs and for lengthy periods would gaze at the shallow bottoms along the shoreline. I shot some of these, too, and dissected them. About this time, I developed an operating technique on living frogs that was unique, I thought. I would catch these trusting creatures and give them ten drops of bourbon by mouth with a medicine dropper. Within less than a minute, they were completely knocked out. It was then quite easy to make an incision that revealed the frog's heart and lung action.

In my youth, individuality was stressed. Such persons as Thomas Edison were pointed out as ones to copy. Doubtless a child experimenting with frogs in this way would be hauled into juvenile court today and declared a fiend. But it was different in the 1930s. Children thought nothing of wringing a chicken's neck with their hands and helping remove its feathers and clean it. I thought nothing of dissecting frogs, snakes, and cranes. What was the difference between them and chickens?

I enjoyed reading, especially the sciences, and spent a lot of time at it. But by the time I was twenty-one, and with an intense dislike for Emory, I felt I should change my way of life, get away, go into a different world. It was my conclusion that the Marine Corps would take me farther away than any other organization. At that time, the Marine Corps was supposed to be the only American military organization that could enter a foreign country without the declaration of war. Marines had been most everywhere, served at foreign embassies and on warships. So, I decided to join them and help all I could. The Marines paid a private \$21 a month, furnished all his clothing, lodging, food, and traveling expenses. All in all, it was to be the first full-time job I had held in my entire life which paid that much money,

all things considered. And, of course, there was opportunity for advancement.

So, on September 3, 1941, I stood in the basement of the post office in Savannah, Georgia, and with about five other young civilians raised my right hand before Major A. C. Small, USMC (Ret.), who was in charge of the Southern Recruiting Division of the United States Marine Corps, with headquarters in the District of Savannah, and he swore us in.

I had been so excited about joining, and so afraid I would not pass the physical, that my pulse rate was faster than it should have been. The corpsman who was entrusted with pulse counting was sympathetic and kind, one of the few of his breed, I was to learn later. He asked if I were not very anxious to join the Marines. I said I was very, very anxious. There were two reasons for this anxiety. In the first place, some of my friends had been drafted into the Army. After receiving their draft notices, they had held large, patriotic draft parties at their homes to celebrate their departure to serve the nation. I had met one of these fellows on a bus from Jacksonville, Florida, to Sanford not too many weeks before. He was humiliated beyond words and had moaned all the way to Sanford about his plight. He had been classified 4-F and rejected by the Army. Now he was on his way back home, unfit to wear the uniform. He could hardly gather courage to face his recent draft party guests on the street, as he knew he would have to tell them he was 4-F. I understood just how he felt. I was a shy person and his problem made my skin crawl. Since I was volunteering, I had no draft party. I just left town.

In the second place, if I were not accepted in the Marines, I knew of no other branch of the service that appealed to me. I know this sounds foolish and trite in these days, but I wanted to fight for my country, if there was war. I wanted to be among the first to get there. The Marines were known fighters; they were the first to get there. I must admit I was very young. We did not mature as rapidly as the youth of today. But as a child I had often stood with other children at the weekly band concert in Sanford, my hand over my heart, as the uniformed musicians

ended the program with the National Anthem. It made me proud to stand in this way. My patriotic instincts date from this period of my life. Sunday afternoon brass band concerts planted the seed of militarism in my breast. I still would rather listen to a brass band than anything else, with the exception of a patriotic oration plus a brass band.

I believed the Marines were superior to all other branches of the military. I had read this somewhere. So, I was anxious to pass the physical. The only thing delaying me was my pulse rate.

"Lie down on this table for a few minutes," the corpsman suggested. "I'll take your pulse again. Maybe it will be slowed down some by then."

I stretched out, praying my pulse would settle down, I couldn't bear to think of what would happen if it didn't. I tried to relax. After a while, he came back and counted the thumps again.

"It's better," he said. I continued to lie there, looking at the ceiling. The paint was peeling. The corpsman was filling out papers on the other side of the room. I resumed my prayer.

He came back for a third time. He counted and counted.

"Well, you'll do. It's okay. Slowed down some."

I got up.

I never knew whether my pulse had really slowed down or not. But I'll never forget the sense of relief I felt, and of happiness. I felt as if I had won a great contest. I was first rate. I was good enough to be in the Marine Corps. It was a grand feeling. No one ever questioned my pulse rate again.

The Marine recruiter placed a form in front of me and pointed to a line where the word "four" had been typed in a space.

"You are signing up for a four-year enlistment. You understand that, don't you?"

"I do," I said, afraid he would not let me do it.

"Write the word 'four' in this space right next to the typed word 'four,'" the recruiter said, placing his finger on the spot.

I seized the pen and did so.

"Now sign your full name at the bottom of this page on this line," he said, pointing.

I did.

Then all of us went into another room in the basement of the post office. Major Small, clad in a summer Marine uniform, came in and welcomed us with a few words. He asked if any of us had changed our minds.

"If you have," he said slowly, "you may leave now."

Nobody left.

"Once the oath is administered, you will be enlisted for a term of four years. The training is hard." He paused, looking at us. There was silence. We stared back.

I thought he was overdoing the whole thing. Of course we all wanted to serve four years; that was hardly any time at all, just four years. I seriously doubted if I would be ready to leave the Corps at the end of thirty years, which was as long as they would allow anyone to stay, as a rule.

"Raise your right hands," Major Small said. We did. We swore to defend the United States against all its enemies. I didn't realize at the time how many there were.

The major shook hands with each of us. He said he was proud to have us as Marines. The recruiting sergeant came in and said we were to leave on the next bus out of Savannah bound for Parris Island. He gave us tickets and handed me a large brown envelope containing our papers.

Late that afternoon, we got on the bus. We were still strangers. We had never seen one another before that day. Now we were bound for the unknown together, in a bus. We were quiet, each wrapped in his own thoughts, wondering what Parris Island would look like, if it really were an island. The bus was old and noisy; the scenery was drab. We had plenty of time for thinking. It was a lonely, detached feeling. I was not to experience just the same type feeling again until August 7, 1942, when I sat in a landing craft as it moved toward Guadalcanal, another island I knew nothing about until I stepped upon its soil.

The shadows of late afternoon drew dark lines through the pine thickets. The highway was almost empty and there were long stretches when we did not see a car or truck along the road.

It got dark. The bus rattled and ground through the blackness, passing crossroads stores and desolate farms.

We went through Beaufort and Port Royal and stopped on the bridge. A Marine guard flashed a light in our eyes, waved our bus on across. We could see nothing, just shadows. Occasionally we spotted buildings, but we could not make out the details. The bus finally stopped and the rusty doors banged open. We reached for our suitcases and rose to stumble down the dimly lighted aisle.

It was almost 10:30 o'clock at night. We were tired. The day had been seething with nervous and physical tensions and strain topped by a jolting bus trip notable for its drab monotony. We rose from our seats and slowly gathered our baggage, a worn suitcase each, from the metal racks overhead. Carefully and sluggishly we made our way down the narrow aisle unsure what would happen now that we had arrived, but hoping soft clean sheets and sleep would soon be ours. I felt I could sleep for at least a day, possibly two. I knew I could sleep until noon. I enjoyed sleeping late. And I did it often. I also liked to stay up late. I did that often, too. Now, I was anxious to sleep the well-earned sleep of the patriot.

We inched toward the door, heads down as we attempted to guide our suitcases between the seat arms in the dim interior light of the bus.

"Get out of that goddamned bus, you bastards." The command came from somewhere outside in the velvet darkness. There was the sound of tobacco juice being discharged. Pebbles rattled against the side of our vehicle.

"Move . . . move . . . move, you morons. Move out on the double . . . *move*." Each word was louder. The last sharp word was a bellow that penetrated the thin steel skin of our bus and rolled around within it, beating against our ears with frightening volume.

"Get out . . . get out . . . *get out!*" There was harsh impatience. The voice dripped with controlled hatred, softened somewhat with disgust. The roar was deafening and was punctuated by



hacks and gurgles as tobacco juice was spat in large, juicy globs to splatter somewhere near the door of the bus.

Slowly, as it must come to a man facing execution that the rifles are pointed at him and there is nothing he can do about it that is not dishonorable or cowardly—that he must stand there and take it—I realized this terrible voice was calling us. Cold logic bore this out. We were the only ones on the bus. We were the bastards. I looked toward the rear of the bus. There was no exit back there. I felt a sense of shame. Such thought of escape should have never crossed my mind. But it was an uncontrolled impulse, a reflex for self-preservation, a final unconscious act as I stepped off into the jaws of disaster. My feet, which seemed disconnected from me, plodded forward carrying me closer and closer to the exit through which some of our little group had already passed. The driver sat bored and motionless hunched over the wheel, staring through the bug-spotted windshield. He had been the only outsider to witness our shame. But he appeared to care nothing for us, either. He did not bother to even look at us. I passed him and stumbled down the worn steps.

I was blinded by the night. Behind our little group the bus doors squeaked and crashed together. The ancient motor thundered, gears whined. The common carrier pounded away in a cloud of fumes, a huge beetle following the lacy beams of the headlights. It circled nosily, heading back to Savannah. We were at the end of the road.

“Get in line.”

We slipped and stumbled in the darkness, anxious to erase the erroneous impression held by this large, shadowy figure about our abilities and our heritage.

“Not that way, you stupid people.” It was evident he was growing more angry with us now that we were alone, a little collection of human flesh to be assorted and reassembled. “Get one behind the other . . . like a string of stupid beads . . .”

We formed a string of stupid beads, holding suitcases, our shoes sinking into the sand of the ditch beside the road where we were standing, looking up toward the little rise where the sidewalk must be. Our welcomer was there, atop the rise. He

was a large, thick man wearing a tan shirt and trousers and a pith helmet adorned with the globe and anchor of the Marine Corps. His shirt collar was open. His heavy shoes were untied, the strings standing loose before our eyes. We could not see his face in the darkness.

"Keep up with me and don't straggle . . . don't get lost." He paused for a long moment. "Understand me? Stay right behind the man in front of you . . . right be-hind himmm," he said in an extremely loud voice, as if he were talking to the advanced hard-of-hearing.

Without waiting for our answer, he started off, plunging into the night. It was not easy to keep up. The suitcases were heavy. He knew where he was going. We didn't. He knew the terrain. But we fell into every hole and hit every rock. The pace was swift, silent. We didn't straggle. We kept up. Soon we reached a barrack with a dim light over the entrance and a brightly lighted room in front. We followed our leader inside the room. There were white metal cabinets along the walls. A table was in the middle of the floor. There was a cot. A corpsman was getting up from it, clad in his underwear. We were inspected efficiently and briefly. None of us had contracted venereal disease or lice on the bus. The corpsman seemed unable to believe it, but he said nothing, limiting himself to brief orders.

We plunged into the night again, sweating. Sand filled our shoes. The suitcases were like lead. We felt dirty, grimy. We walked several long blocks, cutting across stretches of hard earth and avoiding buildings. Our hike ended at a row of tents.

"Two of you guys to a tent. Wait . . . stupid," the corporal shouted as we tried to enter the tents. In the light we had learned he was a corporal and had beady eyes that were bloodshot.

"Starting here," he waved his hand toward a tent, "two here . . . two in the next . . . two in the next. Ain't that logical?"

"Yes, sir," somebody said.

"Shut up. Don't ever come out with no smart crack . . . don't you ever talk unless you are told to talk." He was getting angry again. "Now, go in them tents and get them bundles by the door.

They're cots. That's what you sleep on. You got to set 'em up. Ain't that logical?"

Nobody answered the question. There was no light. We paired off and found bundles in the tent entrances.

"*Move . . . move . . . move . . .* Get them bundles out here." His voice was very impatient.

We did.

"Set 'em up." He stood and watched us.

We unbuckled the straps that held each cot in a bundle. Two sticks fell out. We opened up the cots. The canvas ends hung down.

"Put them sticks in them holes. Take them sticks and put them through the canvas ends and then lock them in the holes."

We struggled in the sweaty night. Sore . . . tired . . . sandy . . . our shirts sticking to our backs . . . our clothes filthy. We struggled in the sweaty night, fumbling awkwardly, confused, our very bones crying for sleep.

The cots were together.

He kicked one. It flopped over in the dirt, but did not collapse. He spat. The juice splattered in the distance.

"Now roll up them tent flaps."

We looked for tent flaps.

"Why, you stupid people . . . what are you waiting for? Roll up them tent flaps. Roll up the sides of them tents." He kicked another cot and a stick came out of the end. He picked up another cot and raised it high in the air and it dropped to the earth. It stayed together.

We rolled tent flaps as best we could and tied them up with the little canvas strings that dangled near the upper seam. It wasn't a military job; they sagged. We had to take them all down and roll them up again. This wasn't right either. We took them all down and he demonstrated how to do it. We all gathered around him and he described how to roll tent flaps. He turned his back and began to roll one. We couldn't see a thing. It seemed even darker than when we had arrived. He finished and backed away.

"You seen how it was done? *Roll up them tent flaps!*"

We set to work again. Dread filled my heart. What if these were not rolled right? We might have to do this all night. Finally, the flaps were rolled up once again. He ignored them and shouted, "Put them cots inside . . . one on each side . . . one on the right . . . and one on the left."

We got the cots inside.

"Get them mosquito bars and put them on."

We felt around on the tent floor. The tent interiors were like the insides of the bottomless pit, utter blackness. We searched. We found wooden bars that fitted into the wooden sides of the cots to form frames. The struggle was on again. Finding the holes into which the bars went. Holding the bars and fitting them on the cots.

The frames were up. We were dripping with perspiration. Grains of sand stuck to our hands.

"Spread them mosquito nets over them frames."

The mosquito nets must be in the tents somewhere. We got on our knees, feeling around the floor with our hands.

"Have you got 'em on?"

Got them on? Why, we hadn't found them. We searched desperately in the coal-black darkness, crawling over the wooden floor. We found them. They were wads of netting. They proved to be a puzzle. They were more of a mystery than the tent flaps. The nets were in a tangle. The more we tried to fit them to the frames, the more tangled they seemed to get. But we were desperate . . . in fact, we were almost insane with frustration and anger. We said nothing; twisting and untwisting the nets in silence. They were murder.

We got the nets on the cots. We didn't get them on right, but we got them on. We came out of the tents and stood. The corporal chewed. He stood quietly until all of us were outside.

"Get in them beds. An' you better get up when I call you tomorrow."

He left.

We found blankets on the floor. The world was reeling.

I lifted the mosquito net gently. It did not fall off. I stood in the darkness and took off my shirt and trousers, shoes and

socks. I placed them in a pile on the floor. Very carefully, I eased under the mosquito net and onto the cot. Everything held. I dropped the net and lay covered in a shroud of netting on a strip of canvas held off the floor by wooden sticks. My feet hung off the end. In the darkness, I was unable to fix the blanket over the canvas and I located holes at the corners of the cot. Mosquitoes hummed up through these holes. They were like buzz saws, diving, hitting my ears and nose, nipping my ankles and feet. Outside the net, mad with anger, were hundreds more, zooming and buzzing like airplanes. The bites itched. I was too tired to care. My tentmate and I had not exchanged a word. I was not even sure which of the others he was. We had been too busy to try to see each other, and our minds had been occupied with the tremendously important issues of life, such as cots, nets, and tent flaps.

I slipped into unconsciousness as deep as if I had been slugged with a blackjack. Now I was a Marine: a member of the Corps sleeping in a tent in the heart of a great Marine camp. My heart was full of happiness but I had been too tired to savor it. Now I had a full-time job . . . travel . . . food . . . lodging. But best of all, I was a member of the greatest fighting force in the world. Better than the French Foreign Legion. I was going to carry on its tradition and wear its uniform.

I was very, very proud.

But, I didn't realize it at that moment. I was unconscious.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Sprouting of the Seed

In 1812, G. J. D. von Scharnhorst, the Prussian military genius who was chief of staff in the war against Napoleon, observed that experience had proved recruits can be taught the drill without beating them. Any officer to whom this appears impossible, he wrote, is one who lacks the necessary ability to teach.

The Marine Corps does not beat its recruits.

But the Marine Corps does require a swift transformation of the boot from a civilian concept of life to that of the military. This change is wrought as rapidly as possible by the application of unyielding pressures to both the mind and the body of the boot. The whole rhythm of each new man's life is changed from the soft easy rot of civilian living to the all-demanding, all-compassing existence of Marine Corps life.

By stern and harsh methods, by subtle meannesses, by sarcasm and edict, by challenge, by defeat, by humiliation, by tests and goads, by sweat and suffering, by drive, by relentless pushes and pulls, by repetition, repetition, repetition, by rule, by example, by order, by command, by sardonic praise, sneers and disgust, by endless minutes, and hours and months of shaping, working, forcing, by competition, by curses, shouts, cries, and

screams, by heat and sand and salt water and by constant reference to the courage, the contempt for death and the deeds of past Marines, each new Marine generation is forged and welded to the past.

Each Marine is steeped in the idea he, individually, bears the honor of the Corps. He is held accountable for it. It is a sacred trust not lightly given. Each Marine from the first moment of boot camp is impressed by the fact his function within the squad, the platoon, the company, the regiment is an integral part of the proper functioning of the Marine Corps itself. The disgrace of one Marine is the disgrace of the Marine Corps. To dishonor the uniform is to dishonor the Corps.

So strong is this concept, and so firmly is it implanted, there is a saying in the Corps that "once a Marine, always a Marine." This is absolutely true. Ties that bind are welded by suffering, hardship, and the sharing of these adversities through great angers, agonies, and horrible deaths. The sharing of great moments of human experience hold families together; indeed, these storms of life are the very essence and framework of unity and family. Trials and hardships, rather than soft pleasures, stand out in the memory as great platforms of courage and accomplishment. The struggle with difficulties is what makes life worth living. Without them people decay and become less than human. Life becomes meaningless, for it offers no challenge.

Though intense loyalty and love are often generated by Marines for a particular regiment or other unit, the Marine Corps itself has the overriding loyalty of its members. They belong to the "Marine Corps," rather than to some maze of unit numbers. The constant transfer of men within the Corps serves to intensify this feeling of primary loyalty to the Marine Corps itself, rather than to some individual commander, or unit.

This way of thinking is not brought about through lectures and color slides, by movies, or by group discussions in air-conditioned barracks. This tradition is burned into the brain through the feet. It is branded upon the mind by the respect for the rifle that is demanded of every boot, by the harsh combat pack straps that harness the shoulders, the heavy steel helmets, and the

bayonet. Every Marine is a combat Marine. Every Marine has shared the rigors of boot camp. Every Marine is prepared for combat first. He is baked and hardened, ground against the sands of the drill field and polished. There is no easy way to become a Marine.

The first Marine unit a boot encounters is the platoon. Boots are formed into them, and, if they are lucky, they stick with that same unit until the primary training of boot camp is finished. The friendships formed among the men of each platoon are very close. They suffer together, and they watch one another undergo the great trial of those days and weeks. By the end of the boot camp training period, the men of these platoons have established a hard core of friendships that will endure throughout their military life, and in many cases, throughout a lifetime.

Though these men are almost immediately separated by transfer to assignments in the many stations of the Corps, when they meet in other places and at other times, there is always news to be exchanged about the other men of the boot camp platoon.

The training is so intensive, and the world in which it occurs is so new to most young men, the boot camp platoon stands as a landmark throughout their lives as an experience to be cherished in a special place of the heart.

My platoon was number 133. It was composed of men from east of the Mississippi River. Those who lived on the other side of this great dividing line went to boot camp at San Diego, California, and were labeled "Hollywood Marines" by Parris Island graduates, who envied the rumored luxury in which these boots were supposed to be trained. At the same time, no Parris Island boot would have exchanged places with them at any price. Parris Island was considered the toughest place that side of Devil's Island, and to be graduated from this grim and sweat-stained pit carried the same prestige a tour at Alcatraz bestows upon the criminal element. I don't recall ever having met more than two Marines who said they had trained at San Diego. I am sure more than just two went through there, but I never found them.

Platoon 133 was heavy with Southerners. New York and the



New England states were fairly well represented. Most of the boots were from middle-class families. Some had been to college. All had been graduated from high school, and one or two in our platoon represented families that had more wealth than was commonly enjoyed by the average American of that time. Almost all of the boots were in their teens. At twenty-one, I was among the older minority of Platoon 133, and I was among the taller men, though I don't think anyone was lighter in weight, with the exception of the shorter boots, who were called "feather merchants" by the drill instructor. We never did fully understand what this term meant, though it was used with contempt and utter disdain. It was a sort of mild curse. But the feather merchants got used to it, and it didn't have much sting.

There were a great many boots in the group my mother would not have allowed me to associate with had she been there, and it was evident that some boots had arrived one jump ahead of the police. In fact, the Corps handed one of our members over to the police before we had really gotten settled down as boots. Other members of Platoon 133 were more fortunate than this man, and the law never did catch up with them. Or else the police must have decided to let the Marine Corps have them as a local economy measure.

Farm boys were the majority, by far, among those from the South, and most of the Southerners who were not from the farm had lived in rural areas, small communities and towns, as I had. Only the men from New York were unfamiliar with the great out-of-doors and were puzzled by some of the things country boys had been doing all their lives. Many of these city dwellers had never hunted, or handled a rifle, and they were unaccustomed to camp life. Most of the platoon members had not been far from their home towns, and only a few of them had been outside of their regions. Some of the boots had held jobs for a few years, but when their draft numbers had started coming near the top of the list, they had quit and volunteered for the Marine Corps. All in all, few men in Platoon 133 knew much about the world. All were very young. Most thought they

were very worldly and that their home towns were the finest places in America.

They were representatives of a nation that was still provincial in many ways; that was strong in sectional loyalties; that still carried the dream that the United States was not a participant in world events, unless it participated of its own free will in its own good time. The boots knew little or no geography. The strange place names where this little band would fight, and where many would die, in the far reaches of the Pacific were as unknown to them as the reaches of outer space are unknown to us today. These bits of land washed by the Pacific Ocean, these islands that were to become so famous, these jungles and atolls, did not exist for these men, and the course their destiny would take was not revealed to them by the slightest hint of prophecy.

All these men were basically good. They had not lived long enough to be slowly ensnared in the pitfalls and traps of the world. All had been born in the Roaring Twenties, the issue of men who had fought in "The Great War" to save the world for democracy, and to end all war, or so they had been told by their political leaders. They were sons of the soldiers of World War I. Many of them were the only sons, for the Great Depression, during which they had known childhood and youth, had limited families to one or two children in the middle classes, with few exceptions.

They came from families who did not want war and represented a nation that had won every war it had ever fought. They represented a country that always spoke against war, and was never ready for war, and, yet, somehow never missed a major European conflict; somehow managed to have fought wars in the Far East and the Pacific, in the Caribbean and in South America, in Cuba and Mexico, in the American West and on the high seas, and had waged one of the bloodiest civil wars in history.

Some of these men had never shaved their faces in their lives, until they were forced to at boot camp, where everybody shaves whether it is necessary or not. They represented every traditional religion in America, some belonged to no church at all.

The members of Platoon 133 had many things in common. They

were young, healthy, and alert; they had sought out the Marine Corps and committed themselves to it. They were now boots. Raw material. People, as they were called, to be converted into Marines by the strange alchemy of the drill instructor on the mysterious stage of Parris Island. They would be changed; almost rebuilt. They would be transformed.

They had selected the right season of the year to appear at Parris Island. The months of early fall were not yet cold, nor were they extremely hot. The weather was as good as could be expected on Parris Island. But they did not realize this . . . the good fortune of it . . . and to them it was a grand adventure through a dark and mysterious excitingly dangerous unknown.

On my first morning in boot camp, stretched on my cot under the sagging mosquito net, I heard noises through a thick veil of sleep. Sounds of human beings in the early hours of morning. The hours when voices carry clearly . . . metallic sounds . . . the hollow noise of shoes against wood . . . the little, meek sounds that are lost under the great pulsations of a world fully awake. These tiny everyday sounds speak with authority before dawn.

At first I was not aware of where I was. Drugged with sleep and exhaustion of the struggle the night before, I tried to gather my thoughts and bring order out of the sounds that had awakened me.

My tired eyelids opened and I raised my head a little from the canvas. My blurred vision cleared to reveal the beady eyes of the corporal shining on me from the shadows of his pith helmet. His leathery features were a study in unhappy stone.

We were only separated by the length of the mosquito net. He was crouched only a couple of feet from the end of my cot. His eyes were fixed in an icy glare that seemed to melt through the sheer net and burn through me.

"Get outta the sack," he roared, leaning back a little and lifting his foot to the level of the end of my cot and drawing back his knee until it almost touched his chin. In that instant I noticed he chewed before his early morning coffee. It was the sort of

observation . . . the disconnected thought . . . that crops up in moments of great peril.

"You ain't out yet," he chided in the next breath and released his foot with all the drive of more than two hundred pounds of tough muscle suddenly released with all the force it could muster.

No rocket sled ever moved faster over a shorter distance than my cot and I did at that moment. We covered the length of the wooden tent floor in one searing instant. I was moving backward through space, sliding over the boards and off the edge of the flooring, into thin, morning air.

The head of the cot dropped like a stone, throwing my feet and the other end of the bed high, propelling me off the canvas to the sand at the rear of my tent. I rose from the earth still covered in the net. I was in motion as soon as my feet touched the earth, dragging the cot back into the tent, removing the net and plunging into my clothes. My tentmate, I noticed, had averted the storm by virtue of keen ears and quick action.

We went outside. The corporal was farther down the tent row, his progress accompanied by the thunder of cots sailing through the rear of tents and the clatter of boots dragging cots into tents and rushing outside.

We were formed into a ragged column and marched to the washroom. Due to the lateness of our appearance outside our tents, we were given ten minutes to shave and prepare for breakfast. We did it in eight or nine minutes, maybe less. We walked back to our tents. This proved to be a mistake. We were supposed to run.

"You don't walk around here," our drill instructor shouted in the face of each individual as he appeared in the tent area. "You go double time . . . you move at a run . . . you move out . . . you move . . . move . . . move . . . You understand?"

Each of us understood.

"Now you run in a circle . . . you run right around me . . . you keep movin' until I tell you what to do."

We ran in circles around him. As each boot appeared from the sanctuary of the washroom, he was cursed out and ordered to join us. In a matter of minutes, about ten of us were running

around in circles. Our drill instructor appeared bored. He chewed meditatively. His pith helmet was tilted over his eyes, his shoulders square. We ran circles around him. He became even more bored and appeared not to see us. We were beginning to sweat and pant. He did not notice it. He slowly walked away, down the tent row, never looking back. He did not say a word. We ran, gasping for air, sweat pouring down our faces in the humid air. We ran in circles . . . it was beginning to become an effort . . . our lungs were bursting . . . our mouths were open . . . we ran.

After what seemed to be an hour, but must not have been more than five minutes, the corporal strolled back to us from another direction. He wandered through our circle, stopping now and then to look with interest. He gave the appearance of a tourist inspecting an odd tribal ceremony. He was deeply interested. His jaws moved in rhythm with our pounding feet, the cud pouching his left cheek.

"Halt."

We did.

He stalked up to a short, extremely youthful boot and fixed the beady eyes on his face.

"What in the hell are you running in circles for?"

The boot was too overcome to answer.

"Ain't you got no tongue, feather merchant?"

"I don't know," the boy gasped.

"Sir!" the corporal snapped.

"Sir!"

"S-i-r. *Sirrrrrr!*"

"Sir, *SIR!*"

"Why are you running in stupid circles, feather merchant?"

The corporal's nose was almost touching the nose in front of him, his eyes were boring into the eyes of the boot.

"Uh, because they were, sir!"

"Sir!"

"Sir, *SIR!*"

"Now ain't you the stupid one, though?" He turned his head to

the side and hacked and spat. The brown juice arced and kicked up a tiny spray of sand.

"You gotta be stupid because they act stupid?"

"No, *sir!*"

"Don't you think they's stupid?"

"No, *sir!*"

"Oh, you don't think so, eh? You go and look at each one of them, and you come back and tell me what you think again."

The boot walked up to each of us and stared at us. He walked back to the corporal. The corporal glared at him with contempt.

"Report!"

"They *are* stupid, *sir!*"

"So, you think they's stupid. How would you like for them to run tattlin' to me that you are stupid?"

"I wouldn't like it, *sir.*"

"Well, why do you do it to them?"

"I don't know, *sir.*"

"That makes you real stupid, don't it?"

"Yes, *sir.*"

"You are too stupid to know why you are running in circles, ain't you?"

"Yes, *sir!*"

"You are too stupid to know why they're runnin' in circles, ain't you?"

"Yes, *sir!*"

"You were too stupid to run and look at them. You *walked*, didn't you, now?"

"Yes, *sir.*"

"Didn't I tell you to move . . . move . . . move . . . run . . . run . . . run?"

"Yes, *sir.*"

"What did you do?"

"I walked, *sir.*"

"You must be stupid. You disobeyed my command, you stupid feather merchant. That's a damned dishonorable thing. You are

not only stupid, you are dishonorably stupid. You are trying to change the Marine Corps, ain't you?"

"No, *str.*" The boot was now so confused he was desperate. He felt innocent of any crime, yet he was sinking deeper and deeper into trouble. We all watched with fear and trembling.

"Now you're lying, too." The corporal moved his head slowly from side to side, never taking his eyes from the eyes of the boot.

"Yes, *sir!*"

"You are a stupid, dishonorable liar. And you think you can come out here the first day in boot camp and change the Marine Corps?" The corporal was becoming exorcised with the thought of this horrible plan of the young man before him. "I can't let you get away with it, lad . . . I can't let you get away with it, by God. You report to me at my tent tonight at six o'clock . . . you hear that?"

"Yes, *sir!*"

"Oh, you are so stupid," the corporal said, and turned his back. "Fall in two ranks."

We did, moving rapidly.

He glared at the lines and shook his head.

"Feather merchant."

"Yes, *sir!*"

"You get at the end of the line."

He did, running.

"Now, you people follow me. You are going to eat. When you get through, you fall in line outside the mess hall. And you stay there."

He turned and moved to the head of our column.

"For—*ward, march,*" he shouted.

We moved after him. He was marching double time. We trotted.

The sun was just beginning to tinge the horizon with red. I was sleepy and hot. I wondered what we would do that day. I guessed they would tell us after breakfast. I was wrong. They showed us.

The mess hall was a large wooden structure filled with tables and the clatter of metal trays. Most of the seats were occupied by

boots wearing green dungarees, close-cropped hair and beet-red faces, broiled by the sun of the drill field. The empty places at the tables were set with trays turned bottomside up and metal knife, fork, and spoon, and a glass.

I headed for one of these places and sat down. The boots in uniform were already eating. I turned my tray over and inspected the big dishes in the middle of the table. Most of them were out of reach. A messman appeared with a giant platter of fried bacon. He lowered it to the table and a dozen hands shot out to grab it. There was a brief tussle for the plate. While this was in progress, other hands reached out and came away with strips of crisp bacon. The pile diminished rapidly. Remembering my manners, I resolved not to fight for the food. The plate made its way toward me. When I got it, there was a small portion left; a rather tattered underdone strip, burned at one end. I got it and put it on my tray. A dish of potatoes arrived. It landed only three people away and came toward me. I got the last spoonful. More bread came. It was snapped up. I didn't get any. The empty platter disappeared. It returned. I got a half-piece of bread.

A metal pitcher of coffee plunked down in front of me. My reaction was faster. I like coffee and had always drunk great quantities of it. I held on to the pitcher handle and reached for a cup in the middle of the table. I poured myself a cup. A pitcher of milk the same size came bouncing through the busy hands. I got a glass of milk and poured some in my coffee. I ate my piece of bacon and the cold potatoes. I didn't have much appetite. I drank my coffee and then the glass of milk. I usually didn't eat breakfast anyway. Coffee and toast. I usually had that. Sometimes, just coffee. I wasn't hungry. And I was puzzled at the appetites of these uniformed boots. They ate like pigs; plunged into the food and stuffed it into their mouths. They didn't seem to care what it was or how it tasted. They ate everything they could get their hands on. Swiftly. There was no conversation. There were calls for the messman who served our table, and efforts to get full dishes sent to one end of the table or the other. But there was no conversation.



"When did you get here?"

The boot next to me was rising, ready to leave.

"Last night."

"You'll eat lunch."

"I'm not much of an eater," I said. The few bites I had eaten for breakfast did not have much flavor.

The uniformed boots were jumping up and leaving. I finished my coffee hurriedly, got up and went outside. Some of our group, which was easy to spot because of the civilian clothes, was in a knot by the door. They were smoking. I lighted a cigarette and joined them.

"Lousy food," one said as I approached. He was a short, sandy-haired fellow with quick, nervous gestures.

"I didn't eat much," I replied.

"I didn't get it to eat," he laughed.

We stood watching the exit of men through the doors.

"My name's Kipp," he said.

"Gallant," I said.

We shook hands.

The corporal walked up. We got into line. He counted us. We were all present.

"For . . . ward," he commanded in a normal tone of voice, "double time . . . march."

We began to trot. He jogged along with us some distance away at the side of the column. We went to the tent area. He gave us ten minutes to clean up our tents. We broke ranks and ran, stormed into the tents and made up beds, fixed mosquito nets, pushed our suitcases under the cots.

We went back outside.

"Fall in two ranks." He was standing in the middle of the tent street. "Here. In front of me."

We fell in, a ragged crew. All sizes. About twenty of us. The corporal stared at us as if seeing us for the first time. He walked up one rank and down the other. He circled around us and came back and stood before us. His face was filled with despair. We watched with fascinated eyes.

"My name is Corporal Blaskewitz. I am your drill instructor.

Give your souls to God," he said, grimly, "your butts belong to me. Ain't that Latin?"

"Yes, *sir!*" There was some laughter.

"You silly jackasses think that's funny? So you gonna bray?" His face was livid. He chewed and spat. His eyes, narrow and cold, passed slowly from face to face. We were very uncomfortable. We should not have laughed.

"Bray!"

We brayed. It was not a professional job.

"You ain't no good at nothin'. You jackasses can't bray. We will have braying lessons tonight. Won't we?"

"Yes, *sir*," we shouted.

"Now you stand at attention when you stand . . . *attention*."

We stiffened to attention. He walked along the ranks, pausing at each of us to adjust us to attention. He pushed stomachs. Took heads and adjusted them, using ears as handles. He kicked feet, with taps from his toe, into proper position. He fixed hands and elbows with little jerks and pats. He squared shoulders, sometimes using his knee to align the spine. He tapped under chins and on top of heads to adjust chins. Occasionally, he dusted specks of sand from shirt collars, using his thumb and forefinger. This was a slow process. Every man had to be just right. The sun was beginning to warm the earth; it burned into our backs and heated the tops of our heads. Sweat began to trickle down our faces and drip from our chins.

He walked to the front and gazed at his handiwork. He shook his head slowly from side to side.

"*At ease*."

We relaxed.

"Well, now, you ain't at ease. You are at slop. You watch me."

He demonstrated. "*Attention*," he shouted. He stood at attention. "*At ease*." He stood at ease.

"At attention, your heels are on the same line, your feet are turned out at an angle of forty-five degrees . . . your knees are straight without bein' stiff . . . your hips are level and drawn back some . . . your body is erect and resting equally on your hips . . . your chest is lifted and arched . . . your shoulders

are square and falling equally . . . your arms are hanging straight down, but they ain't stiff . . . your thumbs are along the seams of your pants . . . like this, see."

We looked intently. We must not forget a word.

"See, the backs of your hands are out . . . your fingers hang naturally . . . you don't hold them down stiff."

He was right. We didn't.

"You hold your head erect and squarely to the front . . . your eyes are straight to the front . . . you look straight to the front . . . you don't look nowhere else . . . you look straight to the front. Chin in . . . but not pulled way in." He walked over and adjusted a head to demonstrate.

"You stand with your weight resting equally on the heels and the balls of your feet . . . you don't stand one-sided . . . you don't stand on your ankles . . . you don't stand on one foot."

He turned his head and spat.

"Now, when I say, 'At ease,' you keep your right foot in place. You just move your left foot. You don't talk . . . you don't say a word . . . you keep your right foot in place . . . and you can move around that way . . . as long as you keep your right foot in place."

I tried this to see how far I could move without lifting my right foot.

"An' what do you think you are doin'?"

I froze, my blood ice. He was bearing down on me like a tractor in a corn field.

"I was practicing," I said hurriedly, hoping such eagerness for knowledge was compensation for error.

He thrust his face in mine and chewed slowly. He stood nose to nose for what seemed an eternity.

"Don't do no practicin' unless I tell you to practice," he said.

"Yes, sir!" I answered, staring straight ahead. I felt humiliated and wished I could crawl into a hole and cover myself up. I resolved not to be caught doing anything wrong again. Now I understood how the feather merchant must have suffered during his long ordeal.

Corporal Blaskewitz called us to attention and marched us out

to the drill field. Our tents were in rows arranged so that two long lines of tents faced each other with a broad, dirt strip between, forming what was called a street. Each platoon of boots was housed in this double-row formation of tents. It was their house; their street; their city.

The streets led into the drill field in one direction and toward the mess hall in another. Beyond the drill field was a paved street with sidewalks on each side, and these led to civilization. Along this paved street, and other paved streets that led off it, were the old wooden barracks, the bachelor officers quarters, the post exchange, the senior officers quarters, and married officers houses. There was a school for children of post families, an interdenominational, military church pastored by a Navy chaplain, the hospital, brig, garages, and other permanent-type structures necessary for a training command.

We marched down the company street toward the drill field, a wide, long, sandy plateau without a blade of grass or a tree. I was to learn this route well—this path to the drill field and back, but on this first real day in the Marine Corps, it was an adventure, an exploration of new territory and new sights.

We marched to the middle of the field and halted. Since many of the commands made no sense to us, and the cadence was sung in what was then the “unknown tongue,” as far as we were concerned, we were not the most orderly marchers on the island. Marines do not count cadence, or give commands, as they do in the Army or Navy. That is, Marines pronounce the same commands differently. The command “Forward” is an example: it is pronounced something like “*Fa-werrrd*,” and followed by a loud bellow—similar to the sound made when one is struck in the stomach with a wet squirrel—which means “March.”

The command “*Fa-werrrd, humphff*,” strained through tobacco juice in such a way as to have a moist, fruity tone, and delivered in deep, muffled, and belligerent bellows from a distance, is difficult for civilian ears to interpret. It is difficult even though it is one of the more easily understood commands—and one of the most frequently used. As the commands become more complex, they become even more unintelligible. For example, the

command "*Att—teen—huph, riiight shoal—deeer harmssss, lefff—hace, fa—werrd humphff . . . oiugh, threep, leffh, ouigh . . .*" means in simple English a very simple thing. It means "Attention, right shoulder arms, left face, forward march, one, three, left, one . . ." The "One, three, left, one" are all cadence counts for the left foot. Each time they are called, the left foot is supposed to be hitting the ground.

We did not get these more complex commands the first day, as we did not have any arms, or uniforms, or anything else. We were merely learning how to walk in a clump. It wasn't marching, really. It was scraggling. But it was a start. Anyway, by some mysterious sixth sense we had discovered that Corporal Blaske-witz was killing time, in his own way, waiting for the remainder of our platoon to arrive. There had been a few in our tent area before my little group of six had stolen in during the middle of the night, and more were expected.

We were not told this. But somehow we knew it. Most of us did not know what size group we were supposed to be, but we had seen more advanced platoons of boots marching and had observed they were composed of a much larger number of people than our own. None of us had discussed this, for we had not had the chance. We had been under the watchful eye of the drill instructor, or asleep, every minute. Nevertheless, the feeling that we were not whole, so to speak, permeated our minds, and we watched as best we could to see if we were not right.

Now we were standing in the middle of the drill field. It was painfully obvious that Corporal Blaskewitz was ashamed of us. He was evidently embarrassed to be seen with us. In his eyes we were lepers drenched by the sun, our civilian clothing moist and dirty, our shoes full of sand, our long hair blowing in the hot, sea air.

"When you march, you step off on your *left* foot." He allowed this announcement to sink in.

"When I give the command, '*Fa—werrrd, humphff,*' you step off smartly on your left foot . . . but not until I say '*humphff.*'"

He eyed us carefully, his shoulders square, head up, chin in, heels together and feet at a forty-five degree angle.

He spat and shifted his wad of tobacco to the other cheek. A sardonic, evil expression passed over his face. We had learned to watch his expression intently, trying to divine his innermost thought in time to employ any tactic we could to prevent ourselves from being made complete fools.

"Lift up your left foot."

We did.

He walked slowly down the front rank.

He paused.

"Do you have your left foot on a different side from other folks?" he asked a tall, heavily built boot.

"No, *sir!*"

"Then that must be your right foot?"

"Yes, *sir!*"

"Why do you have it high in the air? Are you a bird?"

"No, *sir!*"

"That is not your left, left, *left* foot: that's your right, right, *right* foot! ! !"

"Yes, *sir.*"

"Don't you know your *right* from your *left*?"

"No, *sir.*"

We listened to this exchange in terror. Did we have the left foot up, or not? I glanced down. Yes. I had my left foot up. I gave silent thanks to my public school system. I knew the difference between right and left.

"Get your left foot up."

The boot did.

"Remember which is which, stupid."

Corporal Blaskewitz moved on. He found four more wrong feet in the air. Each discovery was greeted by him as something new and astonishing. No one would have ever guessed he had ever seen anyone before who had made that error, so great was his surprise. He discussed it with each sweating fumbler. Meanwhile, the rest of us stood with our feet up. It was a very tiring position. We began to wish everyone in the world knew right from left;

we thought about how easy it would be to learn this lesson . . . learn it early in life . . . and be done with it.

But life is not as easy as that. Life is a long, painful education in little things. It is learning and relearning of simple matters; first as children, then through every stage of life. The great, important things children know instinctively are lost to older persons, lost in the complex maze of being grown. Children know a friend on sight, but cannot tell why; kindness and goodness to them have an aura and they see it and recognize it and accept it as a natural order of life; but adults must grope for the simple enduring values slowly, suspiciously seeking them, often afraid to embrace them or recognize them when they are within their presence. And children can forgive, can laugh and cry over things that matter. And can feel and see and taste the goodness and sweetness of life for they have the wonder and breathlessness of faith in the mystery of life for good . . . in its power to produce all the wonders of their imaginations. And as they grow older a sadness comes over them. They cannot explain it, but it is a deep and abiding sadness that witnesses the breakup of lifelong ties and affections and friendships. The cords of childhood are slowly broken one by one, as the years pass and new relationships are formed and the wonder that is of childhood fades into the mysteries of memory.

The pulsations of life are unending processes of such forces of learning and relearning of simple things. Elementary things that mean life or death. There comes a time when elementary things must be learned as if they were entirely new and strange. They must be learned because the spark of being resides in them. A man who does not know his right from his left can cause the death of hundreds of men who do know this simple thing. Unless everyone is clear on which is his right and which is his left, a battle could be lost, or a squad, or a gun position. Such knowledge of little things must be right and instinctive, not subject to hesitation or indecision, not subject to thought.

Corporal Blaskewitz was probing for these weaknesses; the small simple things that were wrong. He must find them and correct them. Our lives depended on it.

He knew from the thousands of men he had faced on this drill field that in each platoon of them more than one or two, sometimes a half dozen, would not know their right foot from their left. It was a serious matter, not easily corrected. It takes time and firmness to change a thought pattern that has been wrong since the beginning of life. He would pound away about feet, until when the final day came, when boots were made into Marines, they would know which was right and which was left.

We held up our left feet.

Corporal Blaskewitz did not discuss the importance of left and right feet. He did not praise the left foot at all, which is the key foot, or the right foot, which is of great help. He only said we had better know the difference, or we would be punished.

He completed his inspection. Now everyone was standing on right feet with left feet in the air. He walked to the front, making square turns with military paces to get into position. Example was a method of teaching. We watched him carefully; it had not taken him long to teach us to do that. Our leg muscles were vibrating. It was a decided effort to keep erect.

"*At ease,*" he shouted, glaring through us.

Now we had both feet on the ground. It felt good.

By lunchtime I was starving. By nightfall I was half dead. My face was blistered and a burning red. My whole body ached. My eyes burned and my feet throbbed.

We were allowed to clean up at 4:30 that afternoon. No shower ever felt so wonderful, no water ever had such soothing, healing qualities. At 5:00 we were marched to the mess hall, and I was starved again. I ate everything placed before me. I fought and tugged at the platters of food with the most ardent chowhounds. My plate was full and my cup ran over.

We marched back to our tent city. I was blind with fatigue. We were told to stay in the tent area, not to leave our street, and were dismissed. I staggered into my tent followed by my tentmate. I told him my name.

"Bill's mine," he said, sitting on the edge of his cot.

A wave of pity swept over me. It was evident by looking at Bill that he was from the depths of some forest, suspicious of



strangers and untalkative. Behind his homely face there was an intellect of the lowest wattage. He was of the type that excites pity at a glance, for the harsh footprints of a mean existence were all over him and the dim glow of his eyes reflected confusion at the world about him. It was doubtless that he was of poor seed flung upon tired and eroded subsoil and that his capacities for advancement in any field of life were slim to the point of invisibility.

He had gotten up and was fixing his cot for the night, pulling back the blanket, tucking the mosquito net under the mattress that had appeared at his bed.

"I'm beat," I said.

Bill didn't answer, lost in the darkness of his own mind.

I made my bed.

It was growing dark. The mosquitoes were arriving, attracted by the smell of blistered skin and the glow of the single unshaded bulb in the tent.

"I guess we might as well hit the hay," I said, hoping to communicate in some way. I was lonesome, tired, and sore, and, it began to appear, almost completely alone.

"Yeh," Bill answered. He was taking off his shirt.

I walked to the tent door and looked out. The street was empty. It was completely dark. Down the street only a few lights showed. It was a depressing sight. I lighted a cigarette and smoked. It tasted wonderful. I finished it and looked around for a place to put the butt. I didn't see anything. I threw it to the ground and stepped on it.

I turned back to my cot, its yellow mosquito net sagging between the support poles. Bill was asleep. I undressed and slipped into my cot, tucking in the net behind me. The light was still on. I got back out and turned it off. Back in the bed again. In the process I had captured some mosquitoes.

To hell with them, I thought. I slipped into unconsciousness.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Miserable Dragons

The next day our boot platoon was full. They had come in from somewhere during the night. Now they were with us in the pre-dawn darkness being cursed by Corporal Blaskewitz before breakfast.

There were sixty-one of us, and Corporal Blaskewitz.

The arrival of this new blood marked an intensification of activities that our little band of first arrivals had considered severe: We were in motion from dark to dark; every minute was used, no second was wasted. We drew uniforms and equipment; we packed civilian clothing for shipment back home; we received short haircuts; we went through an intensive physical at the base hospital. Our teeth were carefully checked and recorded on dental charts. We all got to talk briefly with a psychiatrist. By this time, most of us felt we should have seen a psychiatrist before we joined, and this became a little joke that was carefully concealed from the ears of the hovering drill instructor.

The dental examination was the most revolting of all. This may seem strange, but to me it was a sickening experience. We stood in a long line for it, slowly drawing nearer and nearer

the dental chair. Finally, my turn came. The dentist, in the press of our numbers and the sheer monotony of the job that stretched endlessly before him, wasted no time in washing his hands or in idle chitchat that brightens such examinations in civilian life with laughter and the sound of running water. To the contrary, there was the rather grim clatter of instruments as he poked his little mirror and pick into my mouth.

The stench of dried sputum on his fingers from a host of other mouths, coupled with the knowledge within me that I could not hold my breath for more than a minute at a time, was sickening to me. It was only by iron will and by holding my breath as long as I could between shallow gasps for air that I prevented myself from vomiting on his white jacket. I thought he would never finish. It seemed that he managed to get his whole hand in my mouth at one time. It was much the same experience a trout must have as the fisherman removes the hook from a point behind the gills.

The dentist reported his findings in a loud voice to a dental corpsman who was recording them on a chart. He was breathing heavily and peering at my molars through ten fingers filled with gleaming metal shafts. I closed my eyes, held my breath and tried to think of whiskey, which was the most sanitary fluid that came to my mind at the time.

He continued to poke with his pick and swish his mirror. I had to swallow and my stomach churned involuntarily. His wet fingers smeared my cheek. I began to hate him with all my being, for I was helpless before him. I began to hope that some day physicians fresh from rectal probings would have occasion to work over him without the benefit of sanitary measures. I kept my eyes squeezed tightly shut and tried not to swallow any more than I was forced to.

He finished. I got up feeling dirty and as if I were crawling with germs. The next man sat down and I watched long enough to assure myself that he used the same instruments on him that he had used on me—and that his fingers remained sullied with the combined spit of all of us who had gone before.

The psychiatric examination was brief and pleasant. The psychiatrist was a jolly fellow in a wheelchair. He hit us with a rubber hammer and asked questions in a conversational tone, his eyes bright and his mouth broken by frequent smiles. When he finished each man, he would give his opinion to the drill instructor who stood at one side.

A boot named Mike was just ahead of me. He was a lean, hard giant of a man who told the psychiatrist he had been employed in a steel mill before joining the Marines. His whole being reflected great strength. His broad shoulders rippled with muscles, his chest was a wide expanse of bone and muscle and his stomach was like mountain rock. The psychiatrist hit him below the knee with his little hammer, tapped his forearm near the elbow and glanced up at the drill instructor.

"This is one of the strongest men I have ever seen," he said. "He will make a fine artilleryman. He's just naturally big and strong. And he will have great endurance."

Corporal Blaskewitz's eyes had a faraway look, and he nodded. I was thumped and questioned.

"This man will make a good Marine," the psychiatrist remarked, and my spirits rose, for after Mike I was a rather bony specimen and certainly was not overburdened with muscles. "He'll work hard and he has endurance. Most of all, he wants to be a good Marine."

Boy, I thought, he knows what he's talking about. And from that moment I began to really feel that I had a chance to survive the difficulties of boot camp. I knew from the few days I had spent at Parris Island things would get worse before they got better. I was wondering within myself if I could take it. I had already gotten into the habit of living each moment for that moment alone, without thought of the next minute, or hour, or day, and without reliving those that had passed. This is the only way to surmount great and difficult tasks: endure them instant by instant without thought for the future and without reflection upon the past.

I have witnessed many great struggles of men with great dangers and difficulties, and I have participated with them in

these tests, and to my mind there is no other way to overcome them, or to remain in conflict with them, or to take punishment and hardship and suffer great toil and extreme danger, but by cutting off both the past and the future and dealing with one instant of time at a time. This is a mental problem. The mind has a tendency to borrow trouble, or to dwell on past horrors. Such ranging about must be controlled and the full activity of the brain has to be concentrated upon the issue of the moment no matter how trivial that issue may be in the complex fabric of events. It is sometimes the only way to retain sanity; certainly, it is the only way to endure under the press of forces so great that before them the human body and mind are puny things, weak things clinging on the narrow edge of existence.

This attitude enables an individual to survive much more than he would ever think possible, and it brings a certain devil-may-care attitude that is invaluable in military life. The greater part of military living is so dull and boring, so tedious and unimaginative, so frustrating and petty that without the ability to roll with events that chip away at happiness, self-respect and security-of-self, the time soon comes when something has to break. Sometimes men try to escape by fleeing the service and hiding the rest of their lives. Others commit suicide. A few become petty thieves, or tyrants, or evil, degraded subhumans. But most take things as they come and cling to the hope that they will survive in good enough condition to return to civilian life as reasonably normal human beings.

But at this stage of the game the members of Platoon 133 were too fresh, too young, too full of adventure and the thrill of living that mark young manhood to dream of the horrors the world had in store for them, or to even imagine that within a short four years many of them would be dead and buried in unheard-of places, or maimed and broken in some crude hospital among strangers.

Corporal Blaskewitz did his best to prepare us for the difficult days ahead, and it was something like rearing children. Parents who sometimes think of the many cares and worries their children must face in a few short years often try to prepare them. They

find they are not too successful. For the children are too new at life. These vague things are outside their abilities to comprehend. They hear the words, and know the words, but the words have no meaning. Only experience will give those words meaning. By then, well, it's too late, really. There is only the knowledge within the child that his parents tried, and that he did not understand just what they meant, then. But now he knows; now he understands. Now he is an adult: now his children stand before him, and he looks upon them with sad and reflective eyes, unable to recross the invisible line of experience and reach them. So, he allows them to laugh and play and be gay and carefree, and through their happiness recaptures precious moments of his own past, and the love of life that spills over into his mature years.

After we got our uniforms, we were ordered to pack up our civilian clothes and either sell them to a local secondhand clothing dealer who appeared at our tents, or turn them over for shipment home. Some of the boots sold their clothing, receiving five dollars for a suit and two or three dollars for shoes, but I packed mine, filthy with the sweat and dirt of the island, in the one suitcase I had brought and sent them home.

We dressed in the green dungarees that are the working and fighting uniform of the Marine Corps, web ammunition belt with canteen and bayonet scabbard, tan pith helmet with globe and anchor emblem, and carried the 1903 model rifle that had done such excellent work in World War I. Our shoes were heavy clodhoppers of rough leather that had tops high enough to reach just above our ankles, and thick soles with rubber heels.

When we were issued a rifle, the number was recorded with the name of the boot who received it. This number had to be memorized, along with the individual's serial number, and was frequently asked during rifle inspection. The defects of each rifle were also noted. Every boot was required to know the defects of his rifle, its number, his own serial number, and the General Orders. The number of the rifle I possessed has long since faded from my memory, but I still remember its defects,

which were "Pits entire bore and scarred stock." My serial number was 322046, which was called out as "Three-two-two, Zero-four-six." The General Orders have mostly been forgotten, too, though I still recall a few of them. They were designed to cover most any normal emergency that might possibly be met by a sentry walking post in a camp. They also applied to guard duty on board ship, and, I suppose, at American embassies, though I never had the experience of guarding one. It always seemed to me they were designed more for use in peacetime than in war, and it was always a laugh to see movies that included Marines walking guard duty on the battlefield. As far as I am concerned, Hollywood has never succeeded in capturing the spirit of the Marine Corps in battle. The movie magnets try to make them like the Army, and no amount of actual combat film has ever awakened them to the fact that they are producing pure fiction that includes deeds that no Marine would ever think of performing.

General Orders gave second lieutenants in the Fleet Marine Force something to do when they were Officer of the Day. Energetic second lieutenants seemed to enjoy appearing out of the mist at Parris Island and asking one of the General Orders of some frightened boot. Actually, Parris Island was the only post at which I was ever asked any of the General Orders.

I was partial to General Order Number 8, which was simple and to the point. It was: "To give the alarm in case of fire or disorder." It is difficult to imagine a guard *not* giving the alarm in case of fire or disorder, but the military can't leave anything to chance—and, too, there are some in uniform to whom it would never occur to call attention to a fire, or disorder for that matter. This particular General Order was seldom asked, because it was too easy and everyone could rattle it off. The favorites were Number 2 and Number 6, both of which were easily confused and were long. Number 2 stated: "To walk my post in a military manner, keeping always on the alert and observing everything that takes place within sight or hearing." Number 6 stated: "To receive, obey, and pass on to the sentinel who relieves me all orders from the commanding officer, officer of the day,

and officers and noncommissioned officers of the guard only."

There are eleven General Orders. A favorite trick of the drill instructor was to ask for the twelfth General Order. There is not a boot alive who has not bitten on this sly bait, and punishment invariably followed. It was a great sin to get the numbers mixed up and give, for example, General Order Number 9 for General Order Number 3. This was a serious slip and it usually took two or three days to get out of the doghouse following such error.

Besides being told to memorize our personal serial number and rifle number, we were given overnight to know all General Orders. Needless to say, we worked energetically to accomplish this but it took awhile to really be sure of them, as they were never asked in the proper sequence. Under the spur of fear and punishment the General Orders were mastered in a very brief period by everyone.

The first day we had our uniforms and were on the drill field in them Corporal Blaskewitz had the platoon drawn up in the center of the field in ranks facing him, and at attention. I was so occupied with all the different points one has to consider to be at attention I did not hear him say, "At ease." I was ramrod straight, eyes straight ahead, chin up, stomach in, and all of that—frozen. Suddenly it came to me that there was movement in ranks and that the gimlet eyes of Corporal Blaskewitz were upon me.

"What are you doing?" he snarled.

"I am standing at attention, sir."

"What are you looking at?"

"Nothing, sir."

This simple revelation on my part created within Corporal Blaskewitz a deep interest. "Well," he said, "what does it look like?"

I felt like a fool. I could think of nothing to say that did not either sound smart aleck or stupid.

"Nothing, sir," I finally answered.

"Ain't that a surprise. Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"



"Way out there, sir."

"Well, I'll be damned. An' to think none of us ever seen it."

We all stood in silence. I was still at attention, afraid to change, or to move, for that matter.

"Come out here," Blaskewitz ordered.

I burst from ranks and ran to him, halting at attention before him. The platoon watched with interest.

"Get one of them buckets and bring me back seven hundred blades of grass. An' you better count right, lad. You better count right."

"Yes, sir," I replied and ran for the bucket, which was hanging on a nail at the corporal's tent.

I got the bucket and looked frantically for grass. There was precious little. I found some near a tent flap, but the blades were very small and delicate. I ran to the other end of the tent street, glancing about in desperation. Near the road I saw a small clump. I fell to my knees and began to harvest the precious blades, counting carefully. The task seemed to take hours. Seven hundred of anything is a lot, but seven hundred blades of grass—well, count out that many sometime.

I got the seven hundred blades and thought about counting them for a second time—hesitated—then decided I had better do it no matter what. I counted them. It worked out right. I replaced two very small blades with two larger ones. I seized the bucket and ran back to the platoon.

"Take that bucket and put it in my tent."

I turned around and ran back to his tent and placed the bucket inside. I turned and sped back to the platoon. They were halted. I reported.

"Fall in," Blaskewitz growled.

I did.

He was lecturing on how to mark time. He showed us what to do. We tried it. A boot named John caught Blaskewitz's attention.

"Private John, fall out."

A freckled-faced youth appeared from the ranks.

"What were you doin'?"

"Marking time, sir."

*"Mark time . . . humphff!"*

Private John began. His knees went almost chest high. The movement was something of a prance. He was trotting in place. The sight was one of high comedy. We dared not laugh.

*"Halt,"* Blaskewitz shouted at the top of his voice. He turned to us. *"Attention . . . mark time . . . humphff."*

We did.

*"Platoon . . . halt."*

We stopped.

*"Did you do it that way, lad?"*

*"No, sir."* Eyes straight ahead. Sweat dripping off the chin.

*"Try it again,"* Corporal Blaskewitz suggested softly.

Private John pranced. Knees working like gaunt pistons, head bobbing, rifle clutched at port arms.

*"Look at you,"* Corporal Blaskewitz mused, walking around the animated boot, chewing the tobacco cud with an absent air of a farmer viewing a two-headed calf. *"You ain't marking time . . . What are you doin'? . . . Have I failed you, son?"*

Private John pranced on, an expression of exceeding discomfort on his face.

*"Have I failed him, men?"* Blaskewitz shouted at us.

*"No, sir!"* Our response was quick, sure, and loud. Blaskewitz failed no one.

The drill instructor walked slowly away. He walked reluctantly and with dejection. He appeared to feel he had been misused. He spat. The brown juice arced in the sunlight and splattered against the thirsty sand. Private John's legs continued their awkward motions. He looked extremely silly, alone, and, somehow, very pitiful; especially so since each one of us could visualize himself in his place. He was a symbol of ourselves: awkward, alone, friendless . . . young and unsure . . . wrapped in the coils of a power much greater than ourselves, a power that was reshaping our very movements and thought and being. The prance continued with vigor, little waves of sand washing back and forth under the heavy shoes and they rose and fell rapidly. Blaskewitz hailed a passing drill instructor. This set into motion a complex chain of events. The passing drill instructor had to

halt his platoon of boots. He commanded them to a "left face," which brought all their eyes upon us and our shame, Private John. We were two walls of boots with Private John and the two drill instructors between us. Blaskewitz and his friend squatted and watched Private John. They held a lengthy conference in low tones, nodding their heads, watching the prancing boot with solemn faces. The visitor rose, straight and tall, facing his platoon.

"*Mark time . . . humphff!*" he shouted. They began to mark time.

Blaskewitz stood and shouted, "*Mark time . . . humphff!*" We did.

Now more than one hundred boots were marking time. The instructors watched, expressionless. The utter fantasy of the scene struck me. The gravity of it. The solemnity with which the group was conducting the pointless rite. The other-worldness of the picture we must have presented; the intensity and the dedication was beyond belief.

"*Platoon . . .*" Blaskewitz commanded "*. . . halt.*"

The other drill instructor walked over to him and bade him farewell. They shook hands. The visitors continued to mark time, like an automobile left running until the driver takes the wheel again. Finally, they were halted, turned, and marched away.

Private John continued to prance. He was tiring. "Halt," Blaskewitz said, and the boot found blessed rest.

"Go to my tent and get that bucket. There's some grass in it. Now, you count that grass, all them blades. An' after chow you come and report how many blades is there."

"Yes, sir," Private John answered and ran toward the tent.

I felt secure in the knowledge that I had counted the blades correctly. I had counted them twice. There were seven hundred blades of grass in that bucket. I was sure of that.

It was late afternoon. We drilled on the hot, dusty plain in the humid air and blazing sun that seemed to burn through our heavy dungarees. Our faces were beet red. The sand and the gray dirt in which it lay pulled at our heavy shoes. Every step

was work and the mind was fatigued with the monotony of the incessant motion. There was the sound of leather against earth, the beat of men marching in time, the sounds of canteens slapping against thighs as they swung on web belts. There was the tug of the bayonet in its scabbard at our right side. And the sacred rifle weighted our right shoulders, glinting dull blue in the rays of the glowing, merciless sun.

It was a holy thing, the rifle. It had been given each of us as a knight of old must have been given his sword. We were unworthy of it, and we must become worthy. It was placed in our trust to be wedded to our lives . . . handed up to us, entrusted to our care, and we were to strive to be fit for it. The very word "rifle" was spoken with respect by those who gave it. And we puzzled over this, and wondered. We wondered what was so special about a mere rifle. We were to learn the answer; it was not told us; it was conveyed to us through the emotions, rather than through the mind and the corridors of reason.

The first act was to clean the rifle. Caress the rifle with light oils; sperm oil of the whale, monster of the sea; caress it with sperm oil and rub it clean; clear it of every speck of dust and grease and shine its bore with soft tabs of cloth attached to a steel ramrod: first a lightly oiled tab, then a dry one run through until the lands and grooves shone under light reflected down the bore by a coin held at the breech. Its stock must be spotless, its wood smooth with the soft patina of long use and pressures of firm hands in the sun.

And each part must be known and its use understood: the stacking swivel, the bayonet stud, the front sight, the upper band, lower band, barrel, muzzle, clip slots, cocking piece, floor plate, trigger, trigger guard, bolt handle, butt plate, butt swivel and balance—all these fine pieces and parts—and the sight, the rear sight leaf with its windage and peep sight and drift slide and sight graduations . . . and the mystery of them.

But first, we must gain confidence in the rifle, and it in us. We must learn it would not break; we must know it was not afraid of rough, understanding usage, of slaps and blows, jerks and thumps. We must learn it was to be handled with firm, sure,

determined motions; not as a babe, but as a teammate in a contest; handled with demanding, unrelenting courage and firmness. To learn this new friend and constant companion was a primary goal. Our lives depended upon him, the rifle. In return, we must care for the rifle above all things and keep it clean and bright and true, and know the rifle and its individual peculiarities and abilities and strengths. To know it as well as the backs of our hands.

It was to become a part of us.

We carried the rifle everywhere. Its 8.69 pounds became our pounds. We learned to handle it easily, gracefully, lovingly, and with abiding affection and respect. But this respect and love did not come immediately. At first we were new to each other; the rifle was a burden. We did not understand it; we did not know its strength, its reliability, its toughness, its simple effectiveness. We did not know its power. We did not know what it could do, or its accuracy. We did not know how comforting it would be among enemies, or that we would feel alone and naked without it. Or how reassuring its weight could be and how calm and businesslike its voice. Or how stanch and strong it was before our enemies.

In the first days, it was strange to us. Indeed, we were strange to it. The rifle. God knows, there was never a rifle so good as the Springfield . . . the U. S. Rifle, Caliber .30, Model 1903 . . . the " '03." Those were its names. We called it "the '03." It was made for fighters who hit what they aimed at, not for gardeners, who sprayed bullets into the air as water from a hose. It was for "riflemen."

But we were strangers yet. It was a burden to us.

We marched in the heat. The weight of the rifle was new to our young shoulders as the weight of the thick shoes was new, and the web belt and the bayonet.

We marched until our legs cried out within our brains. We moved, now at a fast jog, toward our humble tents and halted in the middle of the street there. We were dismissed to clean up for supper. I dragged into the tent with Bill. He was as quiet as ever. I had given up trying to converse with him. It was

not an unfriendly thing. He did not converse. He just didn't talk.

After supper, Mike, his huge shoulders filling the tent entrance, informed me that I was summoned to the tent of Blaskewitz. Mike, bearer of evil tidings, relayed the simple message as if I would never be seen alive again. Such a tone was not reassuring. I considered the implications of the message, and my conclusions lent new vitality to my legs. I sped to the shrine.

I found Corporal Blaskewitz in his underwear seated behind a crude wooden table that served as his sole piece of furniture other than a cot and a locker box. This status symbol, this creation of four short boards borne on four two-by-four legs, loomed before me and I stood at attention. At one side stood Private John. His presence meant only one thing. He had not counted the same number of blades of grass as I had.

"How many blades of grass did I tell you to harvest, Gallant?" Blaskewitz's eye was narrow and glinting in the semigloom of his sanctuary.

"Seven hundred, sir," I promptly answered.

"How many blades of grass did you count, Private John?"

"Seven hundred and one."

This revelation completely caught me off guard. How had the extra piece of grass crept in the bucket?

"How do you account for that, son?"

I was hard pressed. I couldn't. "I don't know, sir," I said.

"Can't you count to seven hundred and stop?"

"Yes, sir; I did."

Blaskewitz turned.

"Are you lying to me, Private John?"

John appeared shocked. "No, sir," he cried.

Blaskewitz considered this turn of affairs. He scratched his chest with a large, thick-fingered hand. The sandpapery sound dominated the stillness.

"Are you lying to me, Gallant?"

"No, sir," I said, wondering how I could ever prove it.

Blaskewitz sat and scratched. We stood motionless, our minds in a state of panic. I prayed I would not have to gather another

batch of grass in the gloom of night. It had been difficult enough to find in broad daylight.

"This is a serious matter," Blaskewitz observed, glaring at each of us in turn.

We said nothing, afraid anything we might say would be turned against us. Inwardly, I was beginning to hate Private John, though my better nature told me such feeling was unfair to the extreme. On the other hand, he knew how many blades I had been ordered to get. Why hadn't he come up with the correct figure? I could not understand it.

"Did you pick some damaged blades?" Blaskewitz asked me.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Did you pick some blades that was not whole, but was tore?"

I thought back over the blades of grass. The truth was I had not inspected them, only counted them.

"I could have, sir," I finally said.

Blaskewitz shifted his cold stare. "Did you notice tore blades?"

Private John hesitated. "Well, sir . . ." he began ". . . yes, I did."

Blaskewitz considered this carefully.

"What would you do, if you was me?" he asked. "What would you think if you was faced with conflicting reports like this. What would you think if you couldn't get at the truth . . . couldn't depend on college folks like you to count them blades and come up with the same number twice?"

"I don't know, sir," Private John answered.

"I can't think of anything, either, sir," I said.

"Well, I'll have to keep the bucket of them blades an' git it counted again, an' see who's right. Now, don't let this happen again. There ain't room for sloppy execution of orders in the Corps. You understand?"

We did.

Blaskewitz dismissed us with a wave of his hand and we fled into the darkness, anxious to have a few minutes of our own before lights out. A few minutes to gather our thoughts, and to just sit down. I had never thought before what a privilege it was to sit, relax, and smoke a cigarette. We could smoke during

the day only when there was a brief halt for the purpose.

Since Blaskewitz chewed, the halts for smoking were infrequent. And when they occurred, they were brief. These precious occasions were activated by the order, "The smoking lamp is lit," which merely meant we would be able to smoke until "the smoking lamp is out" was given. It was evident to us all that Blaskewitz considered smoking a waste of time. It was a rare case when anyone got to smoke more than a half cigarette at a time. Too, we learned early that you did not flip cigarette butts away, as is done by civilians. The ritual of disposing of cigarette butts included knocking the glowing end off, tearing the paper and scattering the tobacco it contained and then rolling the paper into a tiny ball and grinding it underfoot until it just no longer existed.

Directly after breakfast each morning, when time was of the essence, we had to carefully search the area around our tents for any cigarette butts and destroy them. The search for cigarette butts is one of the great activities of all Marine privates, and they soon learn to destroy butts immediately, rather than bear the burden of picking them up from the ground.

During the first week I was in boot camp, I found time to write my parents and tell them I was at Parris Island.

"Don't worry about me," I wrote. "I am getting something here no college in the nation can give." This was certainly true, but I did not elaborate. However, in a burst of youthful philosophy, I continued by noting: "We are learning the stuff of which the pioneers were made when they welded this country into a mighty nation."

I told them I could "have nothing the government doesn't issue me, so send nothing," and I added that "all our mail is censored—both that we receive and that we send." And I closed by assuring them that "you will be proud of your son as a Marine—it is an honor to be one."

Blaskewitz never mentioned his own mother, but it was clear to all of us that mothers were not to be forgotten by anyone in his platoon. He often asked us what our mothers would think



about various things we did, and the answer expected and given was that mother would not like it.

He ordered the entire platoon out one Sunday to speak on the subject of motherhood and the proper respect for all mothers. After we were formed into ranks and at attention in the company street, he began with the first man in the front rank and asked each of us individually the question, "Have you written your mother?" Many had not, and a negative answer brought a rigid cross-examination into the depraved reasoning of a boot who would not write home.

"Why, you pitiful playboy," he snorted to Radek, a product of the more fruity residential area of New York, who had responded that he had not set pen to paper, "she would write to you if she was in boot camp and you was at home."

Blaskewitz's red face blazed in the Sabbath sun, and his nose seemed to touch the nose of Radek. Blaskewitz was crouched, for Radek was of medium height, a sallow reed that had flourished under the quiet lights of the neighborhood pool hall, and the eyes of the drill instructor seemed to probe the withered soul of the form before him. The fresh cud of tobacco formed a masterful lump under the right cheek of Blaskewitz, and the firm jaw was stilled while the beady eyes burned into the weak pools possessed by Radek.

"The poor dear probably thinks you are in jail," Blaskewitz snarled. "She don't know you are being taught manners and are out in fresh air . . . she don't know you are serving your country and acting like somebody, does she?"

Radek, transfixed, replied, "No, sir."

Blaskewitz continued to crouch and glare.

"*Mark time . . . humphff!*" Blaskewitz ordered, his tone icy.

Radek marked time. Blaskewitz glared at this activity for a dozen seconds. Marking time, since the exhibition of Private John, had become a passion with Blaskewitz. The drill instructor moved slowly down the ranks. His questions were searching. Very few had treated their mothers right in the eyes of Blaskewitz. He found more "playboys" and several "dastards" and a number of "yardbirds." All of these he set into motion marking

time. When he came to Private John, Blaskewitz was almost polite. He asked if Private John's mother had a garden, and taken by surprise, Private John replied that she did indeed have a garden.

"Where is it, son," Blaskewitz cooed.

"It's in the back yard, sir," Private John said.

"Does she take care of it all by herself?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does she grow in it . . . turnip greens?"

"No, sir . . . tomatoes, peas, spring onions, and some corn, sir."

"She does all the work . . . plantin' and hoeing and such?"

Blaskewitz was completely wrapped in the subject. He appeared not to know the rest of us existed, or that the bobbing twenty or more boots, who were marking time, were within a hundred miles.

"Yes, sir."

"Does she plow it?"

"She gets a man to do that, sir."

"Where are you when plowin' time comes around?"

"I'm there, sir."

"Why ain't you out there plowin' it? . . . an' hoein'?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You let your poor mother plow and hoe while you sack in and slop around stuffin' your gut . . . ain't that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You never turned your little hands, or done nothin' did you?"

"No, sir."

Blaskewitz appeared revolted. He flicked imaginary dust specks off Private John's shoulders with his thumb and forefinger. He adjusted his head, using Private John's ears as knobs.

"I'm glad I ain't got that on my conscience," Blaskewitz said. "You know right where your mother is, don't you? She's out plowin' . . . out spreadin' manure in the garden . . . and pickin' corn . . . and choppin' weeds. An' where are you? Why, you're here enjoyin' Parris Island . . . not a worry in the world . . . your little gut stuffed with good food . . . everything free. Now you're out takin' the air . . . standin' around in the sun, shootin'

the breeze, you don't care about her, though . . . you got it made. You ain't doin' nothin'. You're just livin' off the fat of the land, ain't you? Have you wrote and told her about your success? Does she know where you are this Sunday?"

"No, sir."

"A damned ingrate. . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"You double time around this platoon . . ."

Private John began a race around the platoon, which resembled a panful of popcorn with heads bobbing in irregular sequence as the nonletter writers marked time.

"Now, you damned people, hear this. You write a letter to your mother by noon. An' they better be good. They better say somethin' . . . somethin' nice and respectful . . . and they better tell her what you are doin' and how much you like it . . . and that you are trying to make somethin' out of yourself . . . and that I'm tryin' to teach you manners—an' that I *will* teach you manners."

Private John periodically whizzed by. The thump of feet continued. Blaskewitz didn't notice.

"When you finish, bring the letters to my tent and put them on my desk . . . be neat . . . and don't seal the envelopes . . . I'll seal 'em . . ."

He drew himself to attention. "*Platoon . . . halt,*" he shouted. The motion ceased, "*Platoon . . . dis—missed!*"

We dashed off to write letters.

The wind from the sea blew sand from the street into our eyes. Our tent floors were gritty and the canvas tugged and flapped against the ropes. Wind whistled under the tent decks and stirred little showers of sand that fell on the dry, unpainted boards and swirled across the length of the tent to blow outside again. It was a good time to write letters. The minor sandstorm made the shelter feel safe and secure, and the flapping of the canvas added an atmosphere of rugged living, and of excitement and adventure, that made life seem fine and good and interesting.

We applied ourselves to our task, each in his own tent. We

wrote with pencil on stationery that carried the globe and anchor in the upper left corner with UNITED STATES MARINES printed underneath. I still have that letter written in a hasty scrawl. "I like the Marines fine," I wrote, "it's the best service in the world." And I said I planned to go to the post exchange and get some tobacco. "It's just a block down the road," I observed.

The nation was at peace and I was immersed in the routine of a military existence. I was too new, yet, to speculate on the future this way of life held for me. I was brimming with all the gay, carefree enthusiasm of a rural boy who had, at last, gotten far from the rural town and the quiet life of young manhood there. I was blind to everything but the moment before me.

The wind blew the shifting sands of Parris Island and in their tents the brave boots wrote their mothers. I was among them, and glad it was so. The world outside was a great unknown to me and to most of my companions. I had never been out of the South. I could remember when the road from Sanford to Daytona Beach, fifty miles away, was a sand rut and the roads of Georgia and Alabama were red dirt tracks through desolate farmland. Radio reception was an event of my childhood, as television was that of my children, and I often sat with ears straining through crackles of "interference" to hear poor music and ever worse jokes. The first traffic light I ever saw was in Albany, Georgia. It was considered a mechanical marvel and was distinguished by the fact that a bell, something like those you can see at fire halls, was attached to a utility pole on the corner and rang before the light changed its colors to alert everyone something automatic was about to happen.

We were the youth who linked the twilight of the slow-paced life of individual endeavor and achievement to a mass-produced, mass-run, mass-organized, numbered, tested, surveyed, identified, and watched humanity of a scientific age. Our war was an old war before it started; we were outdated before we were trained. But, the world was not to learn this for a few years to come, and we served our purpose. Tradition was still revered; men

were not embarrassed by bravery; and men were still accountable, not to men alone, but to God.

So, it was that we sat in our tents and wrote our mothers. Sat in the quiet of a Seventh day and thought of home . . . and told of our new life so far away. It was Sunday, September 14, 1941.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Dragons, Booted and Spurred

Group punishment for mistakes of the individual within the group was something new to me when I became a boot at Parris Island.

In the public schools I had attended, and in college, too, punishment was delivered to the individual only . . . and in the hope the right one had been caught. Though as many participants in evil doings as possible were nabbed and punished, the wrath of authority seldom extended to the innocent who mingled, innocently or not, with those youths who enjoyed breaking the rules, talking back to elders, or who just had more imagination than their contemporaries.

When I was in junior high school, which at that time consisted of the seventh and eighth grades, we had a principal who wore high collars and carried a narrow oak paddle up his sleeve. Always alert and very active, even though he was in his seventies, this righteous educator in the old tradition would swing out his right arm causing the paddle to appear instantaneously in his hand from the launching pad of his coat sleeve. Thus, he could bang a target of choice with lightning suddenness. He

appeared out of nowhere to deliver such authoritative attacks on round, tender bottoms in motion through the halls of the school, and even, occasionally, on the playground. He especially did not allow running on the stairs and was very active in the stairwells following recess. For serious offenses, the culprit was hauled into his office, a gloomy room with high, wide windows. It was here that he kept a wider, thicker, and heavier paddle than the one he carried up his sleeve. This instrument was used on those who were considered nearly lost to the community.

He never had this paddle on his desk. It was lodged in a great safe that stood on four wheels against a wall opposite his desk. The agony of waiting for him to work the big combination lock on the strongbox and swing wide the double doors to remove the ultimate weapon from a shelf was a time of soul searching and resolution to do better in the future for the victim. After vigorous application of this seasoned timber to quivering flesh, the rite of restoration of the paddle to its sanctuary was enacted. Only after the board had been deposited back on its shelf, the heavy doors swung shut and the combination lock turned a number of times was the blistered pupil allowed to depart to sin no more. Such punishment was delivered upon the selected individual, not upon the group by which he was surrounded. The major work of principals, it appeared to pupils, was this delivery of massive corrective force to those who needed adjustment to the rules of society. Not many got through junior high school without having to wait for the safe to be opened. More girls achieved grace than boys.

Flight was considered by the children a legal way to delay, if not prevent, a paddling. Some escaped by daring feats of acrobatics. The most notable achievement of this sort was the successful escape of a boy named Junior Acland, who had ridden his pony to school on that particular day and had tied him to a bicycle rack outside a classroom window.

This was in the days of Ken Maynard, a hero of Western movies who was worshiped by boys of the time for his ability to fight lengthy second-story brawls with evil men without losing

his large, white hat or receiving a mark on his face, though he was repeatedly struck by heavy fists, boards, balcony rails, pistol butts, and lengths of lead pipe. On these thrilling occasions, which occurred during Saturday afternoons when only Westerns were shown at the local theater, the villain always managed to knock Ken down and scurry away while Ken shook his head to clear his keen brain, or struggled to remove a pile of debris that had resulted from a blow to his head with a shutter or window frame. Ken always regained his senses in time to see the rustler, or hired killer, vanishing down the empty street on a black horse. After firing a couple of shots to no avail, Ken would jump from the second-story balcony, which was over the saloon, determined that good should triumph at all costs. He would land astraddle his white horse and leave the scene at a dead run in pursuit of the outlaw.

This jump fascinated all of us in the audience. Ken's unerring aim, his good fortune that his trusty steed had been tied at the right spot—never on the other side of the street or in the back of the building, for instance—that the horse was motionless and at the right angle, and that Ken always landed in the saddle, never on the saddle horn, or on the horse's neck or rump, was one of the dramatic triumphs of the early Western. Every Ken Maynard movie I ever saw included this thrilling accomplishment, for Ken fought constantly and never failed to have at least one battle on the second-story balcony.

On the day Junior Acland had ridden his pony to school, he was soon the object of our principal's attention and was in flight down the hall with the old gentleman, armed with the light paddle, close behind calling for him to stop. In what must have been sheer desperation, Junior turned from the hall, ran through a startled classroom and plunged out the first-floor window to land on the back of his pony. The animal, frightened by the unexpected arrival of his owner, broke into a run, with Junior still clutching the saddle. In this way, one of our kind escaped, ponyback, in the tradition of Ken Maynard whom we worshiped, the vengeance of the law as we knew it then.



Boots at Parris Island, however, soon found that not only were they personally responsible for their own failings, but by not coming up to standard they placed the entire platoon in jeopardy. Boots who could not correct the error of their ways brought punishment down upon us all. There were several variations of this method. The most cruel variation of all, it seemed to me, was for the delinquent to be ordered from ranks to watch while the remainder of the platoon was punished with extensive double time marching, or a race around the drill field. Needless to say, such group punishment did not set well. Though it was forgiven, as a rule, on first offense, any boot who was responsible for repeated group punishment was soon to suffer the slings and arrows of our society, primitive as it was.

Group punishment was always highly justified by the twisted reasoning of the drill field. It usually came after fair warning.

"If any one of you has a dirty rifle, all of you are going to double time around . . . and around . . . and around this field," Blaskewitz would warn the night before.

The next morning at rifle inspection, as he studied each weapon with the care of a surgeon viewing a wound, there would be someone with a speck of dust. This would bring a lecture and the drill instructor would recall the warning of the day before. And it would begin. It may have been that the drill scheduled called for just what we were doing. We didn't know. In fact, none of us realized that every moment was planned ahead and written on an elaborate chart, and this chart was followed to the letter. Many times what we thought was punishment was only what that particular time of the day called for. But we had been conditioned beforehand that such punishment was in prospect for any given offense by anyone. And so it happened. Such a method of equal punishment for all served to throw stumbling blocks into the path of any weakling who complained to an officer, or who wrote home of the horror he was experiencing. As far as I know, none in Platoon 133 ever wrote home any complaints. None ever complained to an officer. We rarely saw an officer. We never spoke to one. He dealt with only the noncommissioned ranks, and we stood in awe of the lofty brass.

But whether what was called punishment was on the training schedule, or was something extra, punishment of the group was always training. It was training done at a little faster pace, or done over and over and over. Sometimes it meant the loss of one of our brief and rare cigarette breaks, or a delay in having a break for water. Sometimes it was an extra rifle inspection, or repeated breaks for rifle cleaning which were followed by just as many rifle inspections. Sometimes it meant drill after supper that lasted until after dark, or a lecture on what we considered our own time. But, really, we had no time of our own.

These were the days before the complicated physical training courses of today with equipment designed to develop this muscle or that one. Our physical training equipment consisted of the rifle and the bayonet and the drill field. These were what we worked with. And we worked with them day after day after day. In the course of this effort, our rifles became light as feathers and the bayonet was no more than a pocketknife.

Individual punishment had to do with training, too. Such punishment was imaginative, but it was to toughen our minds and bodies and to change the softness of boyhood and young manhood of civilian life into an ability to meet successfully with an enemy, no matter how experienced or well-trained he might be.

A dirty rifle sometimes resulted in it being thrown as far as Corporal Blaskewitz could hurl it down the drill field. Then the boot who was unfortunate enough to possess it would be ordered to draw his bayonet, place it between his teeth, and crawl on his belly to the rifle and retrieve it . . . and crawl back. In the meantime, often as not, the platoon would be moved. And the trip on forearms and knees, with stomach dragging through hot sand, would be an extensive tour of the area. But once back, the boot knew he would be ordered to his tent to clean the equipment. He was usually allowed ten minutes for this job. Then he would rush back and have an inspection, which he passed in every case I ever witnessed.

Some of the boots in our platoon had never shaved. But it is the custom in the Marine Corps to shave every morning,

whether you need it or not. Those who thought they could skip a morning without shaving found they would be shaved in front of the platoon by another boot, on orders from the corporal, and with a dry razor.

Once after a particularly poor and frustrating day, Corporal Blaskewitz had us fall out at night and we received lessons in how to kick each other. The proper method, we found, was with the side of the shoe, "never with the toe." We formed in two long lines. The front rank was moved forward one pace and bent over, and the second rank delivered one kick, which knocked over the row like ninepins. The third rank then moved forward, and the process was repeated. Those who did not kick hard enough were given special instructions, and soon the kicks were swift and powerful, but, strangely enough, not too painful. Anyway, if we ever felt we should kick anyone, we now knew the right method. In the days to come we were sometimes called upon to kick the man in front because he was out of step. This was supposed to be done without getting out of step yourself, which is difficult in a rapidly moving column. Until there was some practice, often the kicker found himself out of step and became the kicked. The ripple of this activity filtered along the ranks to the end of the column and was refreshing, somehow, in that it was a way to let off steam and vent frustrations.

One of the boots was called "The Cobra" by everyone because he had been born in the Orient, the son of a missionary, was well educated and could speak one of the Chinese dialects. The Cobra was mild mannered and scholarly without being anything of a sissy. He was one of the older members of Platoon 133. As time went on, we became fast friends. He received a field commission before we went overseas and distinguished himself in the artillery by his coolness under fire. The last time I saw him, he was a major. I ran into him in California at Camp Pendleton more than a year after the Guadalcanal campaign. He was standing on a street corner alone trying to get off the base, and a taxi cab full of enlisted men passed him. It was night and I recognized him under the street light. I made the

driver stop and back up. The Cobra got in without recognizing me in the crowded vehicle. I said some derogatory thing about majors and mentioned a particularly repulsive one named The Cobra. With this he turned and we greeted each other with warmth and had a pleasant ride talking over "the old days." We promised to get together and go into detail on some matters, but we never did. The gulf between majors and sergeants is a wide one, though I don't think that meant anything to The Cobra. Circumstance just never brought us back together. I have often wondered if he came through the war okay. He was a fine personality, definitely a character, and possessed a keen inquiring mind of the finest type. If he remained in the Corps, the Marines were fortunate, for he had all the qualities of leadership of the quiet, intellectually determined type that wins battles in spite of the worst odds.

The Cobra was the only boot in our platoon who refused to kick the man in front of him and got away with it. This was such an unheard of thing, we were brought to a halt, and Blaskewitz drew up to The Cobra to inquire what reason, if any, could a sane boot give for such an attitude.

"I don't believe a man should be kicked," The Cobra explained.

"An' why not?" Blaskewitz roared.

"It's undignified and he can't fight back," The Cobra said in his soft voice.

"Who's tryin' to be dignified? He ain't fightin' . . . he's out of step . . . that's why he's to be kicked . . . after all this time, he's out of step."

"Yes, sir," The Cobra said.

"You don't think he ought to be kicked?"

"No, sir. I don't think I should kick him."

"You don't mind somebody else kickin' him, do you, lad?"

"No, sir; that's up to him."

"You got principles in the field of kickin'?"

"Yes, sir."

Blaskewitz chewed thoughtfully. "Well, I don't want you to violate no principle. You change places with Private Radek."

The change was made.

"Kick that man," Private Radek was ordered.

The blow was prompt and efficient.

*"Fa—werrrd . . . humphff."*

We moved out on our left feet.

The drill continued for some minutes before someone lost time. Private Dingle was behind him and was ordered to kick. He refused, inspired by the noble example of The Cobra, and the result that he had witnessed to the voicing of high principle.

*"P'toon . . . halt,"* Blaskewitz bellowed, his face a reddish purple as he bore down upon Private Dingle. "Well," he roared, "you tryin' to be smart?"

"No, sir; I feel like it isn't right to kick someone."

"You kick him . . . you kick him right quick, son . . . you better kick him right quick. I give you about one second . . . or less."

Private Dingle kicked.

"Now, you ain't got no imagination . . . you are a copy cat, ain't you? Now you run around this platoon . . . on the double . . ."

Dingle began his orbit. Blaskewitz ordered double time and Dingle engaged in a foot race to circle our long column. He ran . . . and ran . . . and ran. His face became flushed, scarlet in the heat and exertion of his effort. His shoes pounded the soft, yielding sands . . . his dungarees were wet with sweat . . . his breath came in gasps through his open mouth as his straining lungs labored, demanding more and more air. We felt sorry for him. But his judgment had been bad. He should not have had any principles. We didn't think he really did have, anyway. Finally, Corporal Blaskewitz ordered him back into ranks, a winded, puffing boot who never argued about orders again.

We were allowed to go to the Post Chapel for Sunday church services, and by the end of September I had decided that due to the nature of the business in which I was engaged, I should join the church. I had never been deeply religious in the orthodox sense as demonstrated by Southern Protestantism. I came to the conclusion during the Great Depression, when I carefully read

the Bible, that I did not believe in a second Hell located somewhere "below." Though I was not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, I did not believe God, who is Love, would punish anyone for an eternity. He might destroy, but I did not think he would devote energy to eternal agony for those who had failed the test of life on earth. I often felt Hell, if it were located anywhere, was on earth itself, where I had observed many sad injustices, and I had noticed that many who declared themselves safely in the fold were, indeed, wanting in many respects, though they were blind to their own faults and weaknesses.

My parents had never joined me to a church, as so many parents join their children. They were not regular churchgoers, and my father, in many cases, saw through the sham in which many of the ministry are cloaked. He was of Baptist faith, and my mother was the daughter of a Methodist minister, who had been a good and faithful servant and had died poor. During his long life, however, he had managed to rear a large family, all of whom were successful to a greater degree than most. Both sides were of proud ancestry, had contributed mightily to the State of Alabama and to their communities in that state. They did not believe in the blowing of trumpets after accomplishment of charity or good works and consequently, I am sure, were rewarded, as is promised in Scripture. At any rate, my relatives, and my own immediate family, too, have enjoyed the treasures of life: health, reasonably long life, sanity, and an income that has provided the necessities of life without the burden of having to set up trust funds for the disposal of excess moneys. These are the valuable things, as wealthy persons will tell you.

The Post Chapel at Parris Island was a modest frame structure nonsectarian in operation and pastored by a Navy Chaplain, who was handsome in his white uniform. Apparently officers attended church elsewhere, because I don't recall seeing any in the Post Chapel, which was filled with boots, scrubbed clean, and red-faced.

I had never been baptized, so the chaplain, whose name was C. A. Dittmar, arranged for a retired Methodist minister to

be present on the Sunday I was to join to perform this service. He was a fine old gentleman who lived either in Beaufort or Port Royal and visited the various boot platoons frequently to say a few words to the young men who composed them.

He was highly respected and a lovable old gentleman of great energy and with high admiration for the Marine Corps. My baptism took place in a small room adjoining the larger room in which the congregation gathered for the service on that Sunday. I knelt and the old minister placed his palsied hand on my closely cropped head, prayed and sprinkled water on my scalp from a pan held by Chaplain Dittmar.

After the church service, those of us who had decided to join the church were called forward to stand in a line at the front of the room. There were several of us from the boot platoons, and one girl of high school age. I learned she was the chaplain's daughter, and she stood next to me. This made me very nervous and ill at ease. She was quite pretty, I thought, and I had not been so close to a pretty girl for many weeks. Her presence lent to the Christian service a spirituality and sweetness that I would not have experienced otherwise. I have often wondered why she chose that very day to join the church, and how I happened to have the good fortune to stand next to her. I had never seen her before, and I never saw her again. It was one of those strange things that happens and seems to be out of context with the general sweep of events.

I don't remember what Chaplain Dittmar said to us, but he did speak for a few minutes. He seemed particularly happy that his daughter had joined us, and I got the impression he had not known her decision, though he may have. The result of it all was that I felt I had done the right thing. I had joined on my own decision and in my own time. I firmly believed in God, as I still do, and I think the knowledge that I belonged to His church was a major factor in sustaining me during the agony of danger and fear that lay before me.

My parents received a form letter telling them of my spiritual awakening.

Office of the Post Chaplain  
Marine Barracks, Parris Island  
South Carolina

TO WHOM THIS COMES, CHRISTIAN GREETINGS:

This is to certify that on Sunday, 28 September, 1941, Private Thomas G. Gallant, Jr., U. S. Marine Corps, was baptized and received into church membership upon confession of faith and in the presence of the congregation at the Post Chapel, Parris Island, South Carolina.

Due to his expected transfer from this Post and at his request, it is requested that he be received into the membership of the——  
—————by the recognition of this letter of transfer of membership.

He has been a loyal attendant at the services of Divine Worship at the Post Chapel during his period of training here. It is our hope that he may become a loyal and faithful member in the home church.

The Post Chapel at Parris Island is a non-sectarian House of Christian Worship maintained for the Marine Corps personnel and their families. The undersigned is an ordained minister of the United Presbyterian Church.

(Signed) C. A. Dittmar  
Chaplain, U. S. Navy  
POST CHAPLAIN

The Post Chapel had neglected to enter on the blank line of the form letter the name of the church I had joined. I don't suppose it mattered. I didn't go to church much. After many years, I joined the Episcopal communion.

After the first few weeks of boot camp, we considered Corporal Blaskewitz the best DI on Parris Island. We also thought him the toughest. He was the most intimate contact we had with the living, moving, uniformed Marine Corps. He represented all the Marine Corps instructors in the world in our eyes. We were his flock; the sheep of his sandy pasture. He protected us from



outside forces. He was Law. He was the judge and jury, the prosecutor, the high court of appeals. His word was final. His instruction was incontestable. His wisdom was supreme. He was authority, as we knew it. He was Justice, raining on the deserving and undeserving such blows as he felt the occasion demanded. But he knew the secret of firm, demanding leadership; a leadership that applied pressure to a certain level—to a certain critical point—then relaxed ever so slightly to prevent breakage of the delicate tower of Good he was slowly building. There is a difference in competent toughness and toughness that is petty and mean—in challenging demands and unyielding standards of excellence that bring out hidden qualities of endurance and accomplishment, and the brazen, loud bullying that creates hate and resentment.

There is a difference in cursing.

There is such a thing as being cursed at, and cursed. There is inspired cursing that seeks the road of salvation along the detours and through the thickets of the language and leads men back to the highroad, the narrow path of duty. On the other hand, there is just profanity.

Genius is required to curse with inspiration, with feeling and devotion, and to range the peaks and bogs and heathers of rhetoric with barefoot Anglo-Saxon phrases.

Such cursing is hymnlike in movement and has great majesty, drawing upon the complexities of harmonics, imagery, and the elemental forces that motivate the human mind and spirit. Such cursing is unearthly and dwells on elevated plains of oratory that demand proper breathing, uvular control and vocal pitch that unite into a symphony heavy with brass instrumentation, crashing of cymbals, lengthy drum solos, and occasional passages in which woodwinds dominate.

Such cursing is like a symphony that opens with faint rustlings in the briars of the emotions, briars through which violin music shyly calls only to fade away under majestic blows on kettle drums of the heart and soul, and blends with great, thunderous pledges—sharp and clear—of excited elephantine trumpetings among the tubas.

It is a symphony whose central passages run crashing—blind to the massive, tangled growths of logic and truth on the path they are ascending—to generate great storms of red and green and scarlet discharges of primitive lightnings into the eyes of the beholder, and outlining rare insights into the depths of himself and activating the prune-shaped note deep within his spirit that is his secret Being.

Such cursing is a symphony whose challenges and beats and chords and movements reveal a power dormant within the body and soul—a power that can achieve heights undreamed, untried. Such cursing is a symphony that closes with fading drums rumbling like gasps of a summer storm, and the cries of the flute as its reed slowly burns into embers spent with effort and fanned by short, deep blasts of the tuba as it tears—one by one—the strings from the breast of the first violin to leave it murdered, unstrung, a ghastly tangle at the feet of a weeping harpsichord.

Such cursing is a symphony which finds subdued tears of sweat on the back of the beholder; it is a symphony which finds its great challenges, its penetrating music, has brought an interlude of profound peace to all who heard it and has offered them a new dimension in life. Such cursing has given them a new, fresh outlook, and the realization that where petty gods had drawn near the orchestra at the prelude, men rose from the sight of the ash of the reed, and the horror of the sweet, dead violin, with the sound of great drums in their ears, and of trumpets.

Blaskewitz could play such a symphony, and we often saw the ash of the reed through the dust of the drill field, and witnessed the murder of the violin. But seldom did we hear such a symphony in its entirety, for circumstances modified it. We often heard the orchestra tuned. Frequently we heard selected works. Occasionally, the central passage. Most often the concluding movement, the fire and the ash of the fallout. It was a grand composition that depended upon inspiration and improvisation alone. Every time we heard it, we were better for it, though it was quite a while before we understood many of its more obscure notes.

As time went on, we began to have hikes. We wore light packs and carried rifles, but most of the time we were marching route step, which is something of a brisk walk out of step—a freedom we relished. The first hikes were relatively short and we got to see some of the island. Our world had been so limited, these excursions were very enjoyable, even though they required more effort than they repaid in change of scenery.

About a week before we went to the rifle range—which was quite a distance from our tents—Platoon 133 took an extended hike. It must have been a round trip of ten miles, possibly more, and it resulted in great agony for me later. It was a Friday. We were on the drill field at the crack of dawn for inspection, which was completed with only minor incidents, and we marched off. As we got to the edge of the concentration of barracks, tents, and buildings, we split into two long lines, one on each side of the road. Our progress was rapid. Going out, I was at the front, behind Blaskewitz, as I was one of the squad leaders. I received this appointment not because I was an outstanding boot, but because I was tall. Tall men were at the front of a column and short men, the feather merchants, were at the rear. This was a sad arrangement for the feather merchants, who had short legs, for the end of the column never seems to get any rest on a hike. While the front is at a halt, they are closing ranks. By the time they get closed up, the front moves out again. It is the worst place in close order drill, too. The rear ranks have to move faster than the front ranks, and they have to worry about keeping closed up all the time. The arrangement of tall men, graduated height down to the rear ranks, makes a better-looking column of marching men than ranks filled with no attention to this detail. Anyone who has wondered why some columns look so awful in an Armed Forces Day parade may find the answer here. Reserve units don't seem to fall in according to size—as far as privates are concerned, as, of course, various size men have differing rank after training and there are specified positions for various ranks. This makes them look more like a mob than a compact unit. I have noticed also that many military

schools pay little attention to the size factor, and run-of-the-men ranks ruin their display of marching skill.

Moving along at the front of the column, I was able to enjoy the scenery, rather than bend every effort to keep up. Route step allows the informality of conversation, too. So, these hikes were more like outings than work. At least, the shorter ones had been. We had several ten-minute breaks. During these we sat and smoked, drank water from canteens and tried to get cool, an impossibility at Parris Island most of the time.

We walked and walked; time slipped by, and I didn't notice the distance we had covered too much. The end of the hike was a large hole in the sand—a depression that had been excavated long ago and was surrounded by trees. We were ordered to run and jump over the side of this hole and land in the sand. We did this with enthusiasm. I ran and jumped and landed much harder than I had expected. I landed on my feet with a shock that jarred my teeth, and I slid to my knees, halting my progress toward the bottom of the pit with the butt of my rifle. I got up and climbed out. We had a fifteen- or twenty-minute break and then re-formed to return to our tents. The hike had carried into late morning. It was a long way back. To show he was impartial, Blaskewitz reversed the column and the tall were at the rear, with the feather merchants, as excited and pleased as brides, in front—a position they had heretofore had seen only from afar.

The return began. Conversation was less. Silence slowly settled down over the platoon, an indication of fatigue among marching men. Fresh troops are talkative and gay, but tired men are silent, their minds bent on the task of movement. The grind began. The breaks were hardly a minute long for us and we wished the feather merchants were where they were supposed to be.

As the miles passed in relentless succession, my ankles seemed to grow stiff and the arches of my feet ached. I thought my feet were merely tired, and I knew they were hot—and the shoes were very heavy. As the pace continued, the distance covered seemed to shorten; it took many, many steps to go what

had earlier taken only a few; the length of time to pass that tree ahead stretched like warm elastic; it took hours. It was strange, too, that the elevation of the land seemed at a more acute angle; the little rises were really small hills. I hadn't noticed that during the morning.

The pain in my feet began to travel up the calves of my legs and I began to lose ground. The column pounded on, but I could not take a comparable number of steps. Blaskewitz, far ahead, had warned we were not to straggle. I noticed a large Italian boot, big-chested, athletic-looking—whose name I later learned was Santerio—was even farther behind than I. Kipp, and even my tentmate, Bill, who were about the middle of the column, were urging me to catch up, and I was trying. I just could not move any faster. I tried trotting, and caught up, but the effort brought flashes of pain like burning knives in my feet and legs.

Damnit, I thought. What will Blaskewitz say?

I had a pretty good idea. I would catch literal hell. I knew I would. Santerio had disappeared. He must have stopped for a rest. I dared not do it. I knew if I stopped, I would never be able to start again. I struggled along now, slowly losing the ground I had gained by running, slowly falling farther and farther behind. The shouts for me to hurry up, and to remember what Blaskewitz said, were increased. There were encouraging words, for boots stuck together against the forces of chance that might mean severe discipline. I fought. Every step was a battle. The pain was increasing. I blamed the heavy shoes. But deep down, it began to come to me that I should not have jumped in the hole the way I had. I had landed farther down the slope than I should have. The impact of the earth against my feet was more than it should have been. The jump must have injured my feet. I trudged onward, my lips dry, my eyes red, sweat running from my forehead into them, blinding me. One foot, then the other; on and on. We were about there, but I was too far behind—I knew I would not arrive at the same time as the others. This was a sacrilege. I would probably be shot at dawn, if they waited that long. I looked behind me. Santerio

was a small figure far down the road. I felt more sorry for him than I did for myself; yet, it was nice to have company in this misery. My steps were not the free-swinging steps they were supposed to be, but short steps, each a blast of pain. I was forcing myself to walk now; it was a mental effort. I thought the trail would never end. But here was the edge of the drill field. I had only to cross it. There was no one in sight. They probably thought I had deserted. I staggered through the sand. It was harder to walk through than the firm earth of the roadside. My feet sank. It was difficult to lift them and put them down again. I moved along, my mind concentrating on the effort with all its power.

When I reached the tent street, Blaskewitz was there. A new cud, replacing the one he had nursed on the hike, leaned hard against his cheek. I moved to him. My eyes on his. I felt a sense of relief for in his little deep-set eyes, I saw no anger. There was not hate in them. And when he spoke, he did not curse.

"What's the trouble, lad? Where you been?"

"I'm sorry, sir . . . I just couldn't . . . it's my feet. I couldn't keep up . . ."

"You ain't supposed to drag."

"I don't care." And I didn't, I felt dead. "I couldn't do it."

"Where's Private Santerio?"

"He's still on his way . . . pretty good way back."

He moved away and I made it to my tent. Bill said Blaskewitz had checked the roll and two of us were missing. He said Blaskewitz had delivered a talk on "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last."

"Blaskewitz said it would be the last time that rule would apply, because you and Santerio had taken advantage of it."

I was struggling with my shoes. I got them off and was unable to recognize my feet. They were so swollen they were almost square. There was no arch; the ankle bones were invisible, covered with a swelling that made my leg like a post. The calf did not taper; the swelling and the calf blended. Having been off my feet for a few minutes, I tried to stand. The pain was terrific. I sat down on my cot. I wanted to cry. I couldn't

take it. I was probably washed up. I would be sent home, a damned 4-F. I tried not to think about it. I went to the showers and bathed. I felt better everywhere except my feet. They felt worse. I tried to put my shoes back on to go to chow. I didn't think I was going to be able to do it. But I did. They will be okay tomorrow, I thought. I went to bed early that night. I was so exhausted, the pain could not keep me awake.

The next morning, I was horrified. I didn't think I would be able to stand. I had to try three or four times before I could rest my entire weight on my feet. I sat back down and struggled with my shoes. I thought the high-top clodhoppers would brace my ankles and I would be able to walk. It was a painful agony to force them on. The swelling had grown ever greater. It forced the sides of the shoes out and rose along the top of my feet and lower shins. They got on somehow and I made it to roll call. We marched to breakfast. Every step was agony. We double timed. I was in a hell of pain. I kept up. We ate and marched back. I walked back through hell, over the hot coals and through the furnace, its flames consumed me. The commands were from another world. We double timed. I kept up.

Kipp came to my tent and told me Blaskewitz wanted me at his quarters. Kipp was a nice guy. He had been a boxer, I think a lightweight champion. He was pink-faced and had a touch of red in his hair. He talked rapidly, his words full of encouragement. He was worried about me, and he was kind.

"Okay," I said. Kipp left.

I got down the one step at the entrance to the tent. I could stand. I started to walk. Nothing happened. The pain was so intense my legs just didn't move. I got them started by a conscious effort of the mind. I had to think of what to do to take a step. I took one, then a second; it was a jerky motion. A few more steps, and it was a little better. I just had to get started; once started, I could keep moving. I got to the tent of Blaskewitz. Santerio was there. He was quiet and sullen.

"Follow me," said Blaskewitz. "We are going to the sick bay."

My heart sank. I would be kicked out. Too damned weak to walk.

We got to the sick bay and went into a room and stood. A corpsman came in.

"Blaskewitz. I've got two men here for the foot doctor."

The corpsman disappeared.

In a few minutes a doctor appeared. He was in his forties, lean, soft-spoken. By the time he had arrived, we had been seated and told to remove our shoes. We had.

The doctor examined Santerio. He shook his head. He examined my feet.

"This is unusual. . . . This man has flat feet, and this man here," he said, holding my foot, "is just the opposite; he has very high arches . . . What has happened is that these muscles have been severely strained—in both cases."

Santerio, who, I learned, was a boxer, asked if he would be discharged. The doctor said he would be. Couldn't march with feet as flat as his.

"I want to stay in, if I can," I said, my heart pounding.

Blaskewitz looked at me with compassion.

"We can tape these feet up. It's going to be rough to walk. Actually, he should be off them."

"I would lose my platoon and have to go into another one. I want to stay with 133 . . . I know I can walk if they are taped up and have support."

"We are going to the range next week," Blaskewitz told the doctor, who was still holding my foot.

"You don't do much marching there, do you?"

"Very little, sir."

"You want to try it?"

"Yes, sir," I said, a great relief surging over me.

The doctor taped up my feet. They felt as if they were in a cast. Some of the pain was relieved.

Santerio stayed at the sick bay. Blaskewitz and I walked back. We walked briskly. While we had been gone, the platoon had heard a lecture by Sergeant Fleming. He was Blaskewitz's superior and he delivered our lectures, inspected the platoon



and sometimes drilled us, more as a test to see how much we had learned, and how well. He was a professional Marine, immaculate in dress, clipped in speech, all business. He was formal, direct, authoritative. He carried his rank as a general would, expecting no familiarity and moving in an atmosphere of respect.

I went to my tent and got my rifle. The platoon was falling out for drill. I got to my place in time. We marched to the drill field, and I was called to front and center.

"You fell out yesterday, Gallant."

"Yes, sir."

"You can't be squad leader and fall out. Change places with Private Maddox."

I changed. He had been three men behind me. Blaskewitz shifted others behind the squad leaders to even up the heights.

We drilled. After an hour, the old intensity of pain returned and I walked in a misty, blue agony of pain. The ache and burning knives made me angry and I lived through the afternoon in a boiling hatred. I hated every command, every halt, every start. By nightfall, I had determined to do it, if my early death was the only result. The rifle range would be my salvation; I did not want to die before the weekend.

The march and my troubles had earned me a nickname.

"Here comes Hopalong. Hello, Hoppy."

Hopalong Cassidy was a Western hero of the day. They had taken his name and given it to me. I didn't realize it at the time, but my struggle to stay with Platoon 133 was the talk of the boots. And the little war within me had not gone unnoticed by Blaskewitz. I never received a word of encouragement from him, or a kind word, for that matter; but it wasn't necessary. Sometimes words aren't needed.

The next morning after inspection, when we were drawn up ready for the day's punishment for dirt specks on rifles and wrong execution of drill commands, I was called front and center. I walked as best I could, forcing myself to walk without too much limp. And I stood in front of Blaskewitz at attention. He had me stand at right angles to the platoon and with great formality presented me with a walking stick.

"We've got a damned high-arched member of this platoon," he announced. "I present you with this walking stick to help you walk on them high arches . . . you carry this stick everywhere you go . . . you don't let it out of your sight . . . you sleep with it in your cot . . . you eat with it . . . you march with it . . . you don't put it down . . . I better not catch you without it . . . anywhere."

"Yes, *sir*," I said, accepting the cane.

"Fall *in*."

Marching was difficult, at first, with the cane. I had to hold the rifle and execute the manual of arms and not drop the cane. At first, I thought it would be impossible. But it wasn't. I never dropped it. Blaskewitz made me carry it for several weeks. One day, he called me before the platoon and took it away. I felt as if I had been stripped of my Medal of Honor; but I was glad, too, in a way. It is hard to shower with a walking stick; and my feet, by that time, were well. They never bothered me again.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Smoke and Fire of Dragons

Platoon 133 went to the rifle range early in October 1941. It was housed in wooden barracks within marching distance of the ranges. This was a new world dedicated to the mastery of pistols and rifles, especially the rifle.

My bunk was halfway down the long room and on the first floor of the two-story building. The Cobra was next to my bunk on one side and Kipp on the other. Bill, my tentmate, was on the bunk above. Mike and Dingle were nearby.

When we entered the barrack, savoring the glory of sleeping under a roof and being able to bathe merely by walking a few feet down the room, we felt we had arrived at paradise. No sand. No mosquitoes. No flapping tents. No narrow cots. But our misconceptions were soon corrected. Paradise was not yet. We found the barrack was a holy thing. It had to be kept like a shrine. The floors had to be clean at all times. There could be no wrinkles on the blankets. Nothing could be stored under the pillow. It was almost a desecration to go to bed at taps and tear up the bed to get under the sheets.

The first Friday at the rifle range brought a rude shock. Immediately after supper, the entire platoon was set to cleaning

the interior of the barnlike rooms. The labor went on until taps. We worked again Saturday morning. Inspection was at 11 o'clock, and by then we hated barracks. We longed for our tents.

That Friday night, Bill, Mike, and I were assigned to the head. We were to make it a sanitary haven and a joy forever. Blaskewitz emphasized that he would be particularly critical of our work.

"A clean outhouse means a clean, Christian home," he belated, and sent us forth.

It was a challenge.

We had been forewarned, possibly threatened; we didn't know which. So, with this challenge ringing in our ears, we set to work. Bill started sweeping in preparation to mopping the floor, which would be our last act before notifying Blaskewitz we were ready for his inspection.

Mike and I faced an endless row of toilets and urinals. Mike, whom the psychiatrist had called one of the strongest men he had ever seen, grabbed a stiff brush and bent over a toilet at the far end of the room. I took the other end, and we worked until we met in the middle.

It seemed like a job far removed from guarding our country's shores, as we had been told we would do, but, then, it is only by little steps that one learns to walk. We didn't discuss this. We scrubbed. In short, we didn't have all night. We worked like Trojans.

After Mike and I had scrubbed each unit, we switched. I started at his end of the line, and he started at mine. We went over every unit a second time, just like the first. Bill finished sweeping and washed the windows.

"Hey, youse," Mike grunted. He called everyone "youse," never bothering with names.

Bill, who was staring at the window panes trying to detect signs of dirt, swung around slowly.

"Huh?" This was his first word of the evening. It sounded strange in the antiseptic surroundings.

"What about them pipes?"

"What?" Bill looked blank. "What pipes?" He bent down to look behind the toilets.

"Them up there . . . Right over your head. That's right . . . them."

Bill reached up and ran his hand along one of the pipes. He removed his hand and looked at it. It was dirty.

"What'd I tell youse? He ain't goin' to do anything as honest as lookin' in these holes. He's goin' to inspect the ceiling." Mike stood and looked at the pipes. His hands were on his hips. He walked along looking at them. They appeared from holes in one wall, crossed the room and disappeared through holes in the opposite wall. They were suspended from metal strips.

I hadn't thought about the pipes. The implications struck me like a thunderbolt. Mike was right. Blaskewitz would know we had sweated blood over the toilets. He would ignore them and inspect the pipes. That would be just like him. Blaskewitz to a T.

"Yeh," Bill observed without any emotion, his face a blank. He took his window rag and began running it along the pipes. He could just reach them by standing on his toes.

Mike and I inspected each toilet. I had never looked at a toilet so closely before. There is more to one than you would think, at first, anyway. The toilets gleamed. We dried off the rims and bases. Everything was in order.

Bill started mopping. He went along, backing toward the door, with slow sweeps. We watched with rapt attention. When he finished, Mike took the mop and washed it carefully in clean warm water. He went over the floor with care. When he finished, I did the same thing. We stood at the door and admired our work. It was beautiful. The toilets stood, shining white, like angels. The urinals were like Greek works of art hanging from the wall. The floor was a mirror. The windows were clear as crystal. No general would hesitate to use our urinals. Our hearts swelled with pride.

"Youse ready?" Mike asked quietly.

We nodded silently, our hearts pounding with excitement. The crucial moment had come.

We three stepped outside the door. Blaskewitz was sitting

quietly, watching the work in the barrack. We stood at attention at the head. He saw us and came over. As he arrived, Bill opened the door and Blaskewitz swept inside. Swept into paradise. We followed.

"Is this head clean?" He glared around the room.

"Yes, sir," we answered in unison.

"What about them toilets?" He approached one and tried to stare it down.

"They are clean, sir," Mike answered in a confident voice.

"How clean?"

"Very clean, sir."

"What do you think, Gallant?"

"They are clean, sir."

"Would you wash your hands in them?" Blaskewitz's voice carried the tone that indicated I had better say I would.

"Yes, sir."

"Le' me see you. If they's clean, they would be a good handy place."

I went over and sloshed my hands around in the water. There was nothing to dry them with. I stood with my hands dripping while Bill and Mike were ordered to do the same thing. My hands began to dry in the air. They felt extremely unsanitary. I could feel the germs crawling up my wrists and elbows. My elbows weren't even wet.

"How are these over here?" Blaskewitz had walked to the other end of the row.

"They are clean, sir," I said, wondering if we hadn't oversold him on our work.

"Would you drink out of them bowls?" Blaskewitz sounded dead serious.

My mind was in a turmoil at this unexpected question. If I said I would, he might make me do it. If I said I wouldn't, he might make us clean the place all over again. My hands felt even more polluted than ever; they felt sticky.

"No, sir," I answered.

"Why not? They's clean. Ain't nothin' in 'em but fresh spring water."

"I had rather drink from the fountain outside." This was a shot in the dark. It was an appeal to reason, if there was any.

"That's a dirty fountain. It ain't been cleaned."

"Yes, sir."

Blaskewitz turned to my dumfounded companions. He asked them if they would drink out of the toilet bowls. They said they would not. He appeared puzzled.

"What if I order you to drink out of them bowls?" His voice had a faraway quality we had come to fear on the drill field.

We were all silent.

"Well?"

The air can only be described as pregnant. I don't know exactly with what. But there was a sensation of impending fulfillment of events which had been quietly building up to this moment. It was an instant full of anxiety.

"Yes, sir," we answered reluctantly. We had hesitated to see who was the biggest fool. We all reacted at about the same instant.

"Well, now, why? Do you run around drinking out of toilets? Ain't anything safe from you damned people?"

"No, sir."

"Why would you drink out of these toilets? Is there something special about 'em?"

"They are clean, sir," Mike said.

We all felt as if we were standing on the edge of a cliff. I did not know if I would be able to take a drink or not. I wondered if good hygiene was worth the brig. Too, it was one of those situations that was difficult to define. It had an unearthly quality about it. It was unreal.

"An' it would be an order," Mike added after some thought.

"Well, that's right. You obey orders in the Marine Corps. It don't matter if you like it or not. It ain't yours to think. You do, and I'll do the thinkin'. An' you obey orders without question. What if you was on the battlefield an' you got orders you didn't like? Why, you'd do 'em anyway. You wouldn't stand around arguin' and thinkin'. You'd move out at high port. Ain't that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Many orders is stupid soundin' and don't make sense because you ain't got the dope; you don't know what's goin' on. They pays generals to set and think. An' when they have done it, they gives the orders and the word travels down through the ranks to you damned people an' you move out at high port. Chop, chop."

"Yes, sir." We were transfixed by this oration and the depth of its feeling. Blaskewitz was not shouting. It was clear he was speaking from the depths of the Marine Corps Training Manual, Annotated. There was feeling in his voice. The silence was reverent.

"One of them damned Japs or Germans might make you drink out of a toilet. You would be insulted and do somethin' foolish, an' get shot. You ain't no good shot. You got to be able to take cussin' an' insults and let 'em roll off. If you can't take it, you can't dish it out. If it ain't the Japs or the Germans, it might be somebody else pickin' on you. If you snivel and whine, they know they can run over you . . . an' they ain't goin' to run over any Marine. Ain't that right?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Now, if them bowls ain't clean next time . . . good an' clean, you'll drink 'em dry. Water in clean bowls don't have no flavor, ain't that right?"

"Yes, sir!"

Blaskewitz glanced at the pipes. "Them's clean pipes. Who done it?"

"Me, sir," Bill said, obviously frightened.

Blaskewitz's features were as hard as rock. "Done like a Marine, lad," he growled. He turned toward the door and walked out of the head.

Bill's face was red with pride. We stood in the head; just the three of us, alone. It was a lovely place. Clean. It was beautiful. We went to the sinks and washed our hands; washed them carefully. They felt much better when we finished with the hot, soapy water.



"I don't use that kind of toilet water," Mike grinned.

We laughed. We were through for the night. Tomorrow, we would have to do the job all over again.

The rifle range area was a separate community from the "down-town" area of Parris Island. The butts, where the targets were, had their backs to a salt-water channel and the bullets whizzed over sea water. The barracks were living quarters for those using the ranges, and for the noncoms and officers who operated the place, gave instruction and watched over the firing. As a consequence, we changed mess halls. We now lived in a different community on the same island and had made our first shift as Marines.

The rifle range had a notorious mess hall. It was known throughout the Corps for its revolting food. We had heard of it even back in our tents, and had discussed among ourselves the validity of the mess hall's reputation. During the few days between the time we heard of the place and when we actually ate in it, a number of schools of thought had developed. There was much philosophy and speculation and numerous arguments. Some believed the stories about the place and others thought only good thoughts, saying it was all a pack of lies. It was my opinion no cooks could be as bad as these had been described. Such cooking wouldn't be permitted, I thought.

Nothing could have been farther from the truth.

At the first breakfast, we all learned the horrible truth. The food was not only rotten, it was poorly prepared rotten food. The cooks had no pride. They were a surly group. The mess sergeant was ill-tempered and loud. He shouted and cursed and stomped about. He particularly hated his customers—if we could be called that—and we received glares of contempt.

At the first breakfast, I got eggs and bacon, toast, milk and coffee, and potatoes that had been stirred in a hot pan, but not cooked. I noticed the eggs, which had been scrambled, were a deep yellow and had black lumps in them. I tried a small bite of the deep yellow. It tasted rotten.

"Don't eat that black part."

I looked across the table. A small, dark-haired boot was directly opposite me, a spoonful of breakfast food halfway to his mouth. He pointed his spoon at my eggs.

"That dark part is rotten eggs. They mix them up with the stale ones. They don't care."

I was astonished. "Rotten eggs?"

"Yeh," he said, taking another mouthful of cereal and milk. He chewed and talked between swallows. "The messmen just crack the eggs and dump them in the pot for mixin'. They don't separate the good ones from the rotten ones. They don't have time. They beat 'em up an' . . ."

"They just dump rotten eggs in with the rest?" I couldn't believe my ears.

"Yeh." He ate in silence for a moment.

"How do you know?"

"When they cook 'em, the bad eggs get black with the heat."

I picked at the dark lump on my plate. It was rubbery.

"I worked in the mess hall last week. I watched 'em do it. They don't have time. They crack the shells and drop the eggs in the pots. Crack, kuplunk; crack, kuplunk. They don't even look. An' that's why I'm eatin' cereal . . . they can't mess it up." He tilted the bowl and scooped out the remainder of the milk.

I watched. It looked delicious. I had lost my appetite for eggs. I tried my bacon. It was rancid. Highly rancid. It had a high rancid flavor, which is worse than rancid; a sweet, rotten taste. It stank.

I drank my milk. It was cool and good. The bread and jelly were good. I drank my coffee and stared at the rotten eggs. They looked worse by the minute. I could see the dear, dead chicks being cast into the mixer. I visualized the black fluids that dropped into the pan along with the stale eggs. A picture of a newly developed feather crossed my mind. I pushed my plate a little farther away and drank the coffee. I didn't get eggs at that mess hall again.

The other meals were bad, but nothing was so bad as the scrambled eggs. Some of the boots could eat around the black spots, but I never could. I always thought of the feather. Most

of the food was not spoiled; it wasn't cooked, or it was full of uncooked lumps and in a burned sauce. The mess hall itself was not clean. This was highly unusual in base mess halls, I was to learn later. The room always seemed too full, and, as a consequence, disordered. The mess must have been feeding more men than it could handle. The messmen always looked sweaty and filthy. The cooks were haggard and thin. I found, later, that good mess halls had pot-bellied cooks, and messmen gained weight. This wasn't the case here.

Years later, I learned that they had done something about that mess hall. But I never believed it. It had become a legend. It was part of the lore. Marines never destroy a legend; they prefer to make them.

It must still be there. And, if anything, the food is worse.

The rifle has always been important to the American. Its shiny, rich stock and deadly, dull-blue barrel, its weight and voice and strength, have been sources of pride and comfort since this land was discovered by the white man. The rifle was his companion while he cleared the forests; it provided his food, killed his enemies. It began his Revolution, and won it for him. It civilized the continent and guarded the long, lonely borders. It won his battles and wars, protected his honor and property, stood against savage forces of a primitive society. It has protected the American home in war and peace; it is as much a part of America as the original settler himself.

Until recent times, every child had a rifle of his own as soon as he was old enough to understand his father's instructions. With it he hunted game and birds, killed snakes, and protected himself against the dangers of rural life. When he was grown, he passed knowledge of the rifle down to his own son.

The rifle was honored in the home. It graced the mantel, the wall, or rested above the door. It was near at hand, clean, loaded, accurate as a fine watch, ready for service. The tradition of arms is an American tradition born of generations of self-reliance, self-sufficiency and independence—*independence not in theory, but in fact; independence that rested upon individual shoulders of*

each member of society; independence bought of self-denial, sacrifice, and personal courage. It was not permissive. It was not necessary to ask if it were legal, or all right, or moral; this was an independence that rose out of the man himself and was of himself alone.

Such was the tradition of a free society. A society free to guard its own possessions and protect its own kith and kin; free to rush from humble dwellings to restore law and order, to exact justice, or to stop an invader of the homeland. In this, the rifle was the key. It was part of America; it was part of the man. It stood beside him. The rifle was a part of the saddle of the Western cowboy, and it is still there. The rifle was in the possession of every weary wagon in the long trains that plodded slowly across the plains and prairies. It was in the California gold fields and beside the thin blanket of the prospector as he slept on the icy ground. It was in the canoe, the longboat, the paddle-wheel steamer; it was on the rafts that drifted down America's broad, muddy rivers. The rifle was known and loved by the Indian, who did not meet it soon enough. It was the tool of the buffalo hunter and the cook of the range camp, the rustler and the claim jumper, and the highwayman.

The rifle was the symbol of life, and of death. It was a symbol of the law and the lawman, and it was often the judge and jury from whom there was no appeal. Other than the rope, the rifle was the most important single factor in American life for many generations. Together the rifle and rope stood for justice until towns and cities brought the compassion of the church and the court and the psychiatrist's couch.

The rifle and the rope kept men and cattle and horses and homes and wagons and industry and the nation together in a day when the enemy was sometimes behind the nearest tree—and the nearest neighbor was a day's ride through virgin forests.

The rifle is still the steadfast friend of the American. He has not forgotten it. Its cold royalty courses through veins of men who have never touched its warm stock, or felt its reassuring slap against the shoulder. When these young hands—these hands that do not know the good and loyal friend—grasp it in introduction

and feel its weight and see its efficient build and handsome profile, there will be a meeting of minds. These friends, they will recognize each other as Americans, old Americans, trustworthy Americans of great heritage.

Should there be another war, and should there be only two men left, it will be the rifle that decides who has conquered the world and who shall be able to retain it. And if there should be another war and the world is engulfed by forces that overwhelm men and reduce them to slavery, it will be the rifle that breaks their chains and restores human dignity. For the rifle is the force of the common man, as the bow and arrow were in earlier times, and the spear and the rock were in the beginning. It is the voice of the endangered, lonely man with his back against the wall and his whole future before him. With the rifle, Americans defeated the most powerful nation of the world and became free. With it, they will retain freedom.

We fired our rifles for the first time on October 8, 1941. By then we had come to know them well. And on that day we were to come to love them.

"We fired our rifles for the first time today," I wrote home. "I really like them. We spent most of our shots getting the sights aligned, etc. I hit the bull's-eye twice at 500 yards, twice at 300 yards, and in the four and three rings the rest of the time. We fired 15 shots. I made 60 out of a possible 75. I think that is pretty good when the sight alignment and that I have done very little shooting are taken into consideration."

The next day we started firing the .45-caliber automatic pistol "along with our .30-caliber rifles—we are also firing .22 rifles to check sighting ability—we shot these for three days," I added.

Before this, we had practiced "trigger squeeze." Proper trigger squeeze is the real secret of hitting a target, if all the other factors are normal—that is, if the sights are in proper alignment, if the rifle is steady, if you can see the target clearly, if you hold your breath when you squeeze, if the wind doesn't change direction and velocity, and if you are in proper position.

The Marine Corps is sold on proper trigger squeeze. For hours

we practiced it, stretched on the ground, cocked, aimed, and squeezed until the firing pin was released on an empty chamber. The squeeze must be slow and steady; you must not jerk the trigger. You must gradually increase pressure on the trigger with your finger until it becomes a habit. This way, you do not know when the rifle will actually fire. Since you do not know this, you will not flinch, or close your eyes and fire blindly. Once you learn the proper trigger squeeze, you never forget it. It is second nature. You hit what you aim at.

Blaskewitz had very little to do with this training. The rifle coaches were in charge. They gave the instructions and cursed our errors. Blaskewitz contented himself with assuring himself none of his boots was wasting time. Occasionally, he rested his foot on a rump to discuss diligence and the virtue of hard work. But, all in all, he only marched us to the range, and marched us back to the barrack. We were under the care of rifle experts now. It was not his job.

We practiced trigger squeeze hour upon hour. Then, we fired the .22s just to make certain we were sighting right. And not until then did we fire the '03s day after day at various distances from the target.

We learned the various positions used in firing the rifle: standing, kneeling, sitting, and prone. And we fired from various distances, alternating with other platoons in operations in the butts, where the targets were raised and lowered, the hits indicated and holes made by the bullets in the targets repaired.

The standing position is by far the hardest position to use in firing the '03. The weight of the rifle is considerable and there is trouble in holding the sights steady on the bull's-eye. I always thought the prone position was the easiest and most accurate. In this position, the body is at an angle of about 45 degrees to the target, legs are wide apart and the inside of the feet are flat on the earth. The rifle is supported firmly, as the elbows are well under the body so the chest is off the ground. The '03 has a strong recoil. It is a frank firm push hard enough to move a man backward over the ground. I have seen small men who had to crawl forward after each shot because the recoil had

moved them so far backward. After several shots, most men have to move forward some. The feel of the recoil became reassuring and a rifle without a strong recoil did not win as much confidence from men who had been trained with the '03.

The 1903 Springfield has a range of three miles. At 200 yards—or twice the length of a football field—its bullet will pass through three feet of solid oak. A marksman armed with an '03 is a dangerous man at a great distance. Many persons tend to forget the range of such a rifle and the tremendous power of its bullet. This particular rifle was easy to clean in a battle and would seldom clog due to dirt. The bolt could be removed and cleaned quickly, just a matter of seconds, which is more than can be said for the more complex rapid-fire weapons.

It doesn't matter how many bullets a rifle can fire per minute. If it cannot fire when you want it to, it isn't much good. The Reising submachine gun, which was a .45-caliber weapon, had the disadvantage of jamming due to sand or dirt. The bolt was exposed on the right side of the weapon and often got dirty. When it got dirty, the weapon would not fire. Since weapons in battle get dirty, muddy, and soaked with rain, such a weapon is more of a hindrance than a help. It is a good weapon for guard duty, but not for combat.

Besides our work on the rifle range, we received pistol instruction. We used the .45 automatic pistol. This is one weapon I never liked and never got used to. I was afraid of it. I am afraid of pistols in general. They are easily handled carelessly, and the unloaded pistol is always loaded, so to speak. Our instructors on the pistol range, I always thought, were the bravest of men. They were surrounded by boots armed with loaded .45-caliber pistols. I can think of nothing more frightening. Though most boots had had experience with some sort of rifle, even if it were just an air rifle, few, if any, had handled a .45.

Lectures were given on the pistol and safety rules took up most of the time. We were shown how to take them apart and learned the nomenclature of the weapon. And we fired them for qualification. I qualified, but I didn't distinguish myself. The first time or two I kept both eyes open and did not hit the

target. I was cursed out for not closing one eye. And after that, I closed one eye and hit within the rings, but never a bull's-eye. I could not force myself not to anticipate the "kick" of the pistol, even though I used the proper trigger squeeze. A .45 pistol had a "kick" powerful enough to throw the hand up in the air. Of course, it reloads itself, and, thus, a loaded pistol is flying around under little control. This kept me nervous as a cat. I was about in the middle of the line of shooters, and there were bunglers on either side of me, as well as my own bungling. This situation was not a healthy one. The air was blue with profanity. The instructors were tense and alert, moving swiftly to keep the pistols from being pointed at someone in the excitement of the occasion. The fact that I didn't like pistols did not make me a very good student. I was glad to get it all over with by qualifying, and by coming out alive.

The Cobra, who was an extremely nervous type, was the only one in the platoon who made sharpshooter with the pistol. He would have been the last one I would have guessed who would accomplish such a thing. When he got the medal, we gathered around to watch him examine it. His hands shook so, I wondered if he would be able to hold it. We asked him how he did it; how he happened to pass the test with such flying colors. He couldn't explain it. We couldn't either. But, we were very proud of The Cobra, and he was very proud, too.

The .45 pistol is used by the corporal of the guard and the sergeant of the guard, and when prisoners are transported from one place to another through the country. In wartime, the pistols are loaded. In many peacetime ceremonies where arms are carried, they are not loaded, which I think is wise in the case of pistols.

When we left the rifle range, we went back to our old tents and continued our close order drill. We began bayonet training and to emphasize the importance of the bayonet—or to make us aware of its potential—Blaskewitz had us drill constantly with fixed bayonets. The modern bayonet is a short weapon, but our bayonets were long and weighed one pound. They were made of



excellent steel. I have seen one of these bayonets driven half its length into a coconut tree and bent almost double. It didn't break, and returned to its original straight, sturdy self. Steel like this is useful. The bayonet served many purposes in battle.

Blaskewitz had us drill with fixed bayonets, our eyes blindfolded, as a punishment. This was an excellent experience in attention to precise movement. The execution of the various drill maneuvers was complicated by pith helmets being knocked off heads by swirling blades of steel. But no one was injured in the bristling thicket. Since this blindman's buff was so successful in creating utter confusion among us, Blaskewitz used it frequently for a while. Finally, we could drill as well with fixed bayonets and blindfolds as we could without them, and he lost interest and quit giving the order to drill in this way.

We ran the bayonet course, too. But this training wasn't emphasized too much. Those who were interested in making top honors on the course were frequently out running it on their own time, but I didn't. The course taught me more about using the rifle as a club than using the bayonet as a weapon. The main objective seemed to be speed in covering the course, which was a series of padded wooden posts equipped with hinged beams. Depending upon the construction of each of these posts, you parried, thrust, jabbed, swung, and swatted with rifle and bayonet. Speed was highly important, though I never understood why. A prescribed technique of parries, jabs, and swats was set for each sawdust man. And this was the way it had to be done. There was no room for any improvisation. The course was run and rerun until this system had been memorized.

There were lectures on how to free the bayonet from the enemy's body. Evidently, it stuck to him almost without fail. I had visions of being involved with a bayonet I couldn't free, and shrank from the problem, which I never solved within my mind. The bayonet was supposed to be rammed under the rib cage, but it sometimes stuck to the backbone, or went through the shoulder blade and stuck, we were told. A bayonet rammed through ribs almost invariably stuck and great effort

was required to free it, the instructor said. We listened with rapt attention.

The rule was to fire a bullet into the victim, if the bayonet stuck. "This will free your weapon quickly," the instructor noted.

If you have a bullet, why use a bayonet? I wondered, but I never came out and asked the question. I feared it would cause complications I did not feel capable of overcoming. But it had always been my belief the bayonet was a source of comfort to those who had run out of ammunition, or who were unable to reload, at a crucial moment.

In the movies, the bayonet never sticks. How the Hollywood writers missed this point is not clear. The scene wherein the hero gets his bayonet stuck in the villain and struggles desperately to free it while an enemy patrol charges down a hill toward him, seems to me to be something they would have imagined years ago.

I qualified on the bayonet course. But I did not distinguish myself. I never did find out for sure what my weakness was. I don't think I yelled loud enough. The bayonet charge is traditionally accompanied by a chorus of fierce yells. I did not shout loud enough, I'm sure. The sight of cold steel, it seemed to me, was more effective than hollering. But yells and shouts can terrify, as the Confederates proved a century ago.

In the course of bayonet training, we learned how to beat a man to death with a rifle. This can be complicated. Especially if the opponent is armed with a rifle, too. Of all the blows with a rifle, the vertical butt stroke was the most interesting. The name itself had a certain devil-may-care quality. It was one of the more natural movements with the rifle, if it were to be used as a club, and it was not necessary to change the position of the hands to execute it. You pulled up with the left hand and pushed forward and up with the right hand causing the rifle butt to swing forward and upward in an arc toward the enemy. The vertical butt stroke was the climax of a parry to knock the enemy's rifle aside, a thrust which was supposed to penetrate his stomach, and a withdrawal to free the bayonet from his dying body. The vertical

butt stroke was then used to smash him under the chin, or full in the face, with the steel plate of the rifle butt.

In bayonet work, speed was of the essence. Boots were taught to work quickly and without undue delay in parrying, jabbing, and smashing with the rifle. The theory was that too much time spent in killing one man might leave yourself open to being killed by a friend of his who was approaching the scene. It was a case of parry, jab, swat . . . or parry, jab, bang—to free the rifle—swat, to be absolutely sure he was done for.

It is significant that it never occurred to us that the enemy might use the bayonet on us. We thought positively. We always saw ourselves charging through enemy soldiers set up just like the bayonet course. We figured we could run such a course without trouble and behind us there would be only the bodies of the enemy. Of course, we would not receive a scratch. It never occurred to us that two could play the game and some of us might receive the parry, thrust, bang, and swat. Oh, we knew the enemy would have bayonets. But, well, we had been over the Marine bayonet course . . . and had qualified. Even with such a recommendation as this, I had no desire to test the theories we had learned. I knew in my own mind I would shoot first and reserve bayonet charges to the last resort, if such a thing ever became necessary.

But it has been the general trend of war to reduce hand-to-hand fighting. Automatic weapons and great volumes of fire take care of most situations. Explosives, flamethrowers, and canister serve to blast, burn and cut the enemy from defensive fortifications which would have meant the bayonet in World War I. This is not to say there are not many situations even today that might call for the bayonet, but they will be isolated incidents involving small numbers. The bayonet is still the finest thing in the world for civil uprisings, riots, and situations involving mobs of unarmed persons. It is an effective method of moving crowds. There is no arguing with the bayonet; it is a cold, silent, efficient weapon that has come down from the days of the sword, spear, pike, and rapier. It still has its place in the world of disciplined violence that is the military.

By the first of November 1941 we had completed our boot training. We were deeply tanned, trim and hard. We had developed great endurance and our minds had been conditioned to accept commands without question and our bodies had been taught to respond to orders quickly and efficiently. We were not quite the same persons who had arrived in September. There had been many changes, not only in our outlook on life, but in our lives. Our days had been rearranged, our food had been changed, our appetites had been increased, our weight had been reduced in most cases, and we got more sleep, worked harder for longer hours than we ever had before. By now we had been convinced the Marine Corps was the great fighting unit of the world. We respected the Marine Corps, revered it, and were absolutely loyal to it. We were proud to be a part of this organization, and it had been dinned into our minds we were lucky to be in that particular uniform.

During boot camp, our sense of values had changed. We had learned toughness is not smart aleck. We had learned it is, many times, not necessarily dependent upon size. We had learned there is a difference between strength and endurance, and words cannot kill. We had learned an effective fighting force is not just an armed group in uniform, but it is a trained armed group in uniform that believes in itself, has confidence in each individual within itself, and respects those in authority, no matter what the rank. We learned the world does not revolve around each of us individually; we found we were not, individually, the center of the universe—a thought pattern most civilians fall into. We found qualities of good and usefulness in every man who had qualified for the uniform, though there might be those qualities in larger measure in some than in others.

Above all, we had undergone the same experience together; we had suffered as a family of strangers at first; then we suffered as acquaintances, unsure of each other, embarrassed before one another by humiliations of our metamorphosis from unsure, soft civilians to a more harsh, brittle form of life; then we suffered as friends struggling to master the same challenges and obstacles. But, finally, in those last days, we suffered as a family

born of the same body and tended by the same midwife and brought forth into the same world of hardship and bitterness, joy and reward. And, so it was we came to love one another as brothers of the same house and lineage. By some mysterious alchemy of the spirit out of hardship and heartache there had come to weave us together a bond of great strength that was to reach around the world and through the years. All these fine young men had been taken from a great diversity of homes, attitudes, cultures, and heritages and welded together, not by command that they must become one, but by a mutual, unique experience shared by no one who has not been a Marine, but shared by all who have been.

It was the miracle of Marine boot camp that wrought this vast change. It purged our minds of doubts about ourselves. It marked our weaknesses before our own eyes, and polished our strengths for all to see. Boot camp gave us confidence and courage without expenditure of millions of dollars. The tools were few and very simple: a good drill instructor, a rifle and bayonet, a drill field, food and shelter. With these things the Marine Corps built the most terrible machine of destruction ever devised, for with these things it instilled in men a substance that has no weight and cannot be destroyed; an invisible substance that can be felt but not seen. That substance is pride in the United States Marine Corps. You can see this same mysterious substance today in a new generation of Marines; they have been built upon a proud rock of military achievement. Their pride is not a false pride, an empty pride, drawn from emptiness. Rather, it is a pride based upon great deeds accomplished by great men in the grim, silent struggles with death.

In our last days of boot camp, we paraded down the long, familiar field for our final inspection. The band's great voice, filled with the majestic beat of drums and songs of brass, charged the cool morning air with patriotism and lifted our hearts with happiness. In this grand atmosphere of strength and exhilaration, we moved down the field and back to pass in front of the reviewing stand. There is no finer sight than Marine boots marching

in their final days of training. Long hours of movement together have polished the art and they are at the peak of perfection. The platoons have worked day after day under a drill instructor who has been with them from the beginning. The timing is perfect in execution of commands. The heavy shoes strike the earth with the unmatched rhythm of hundreds of feet hitting at the same instant to make a music peculiar unto itself. The squeak of leather. The gleam of rifles. The bright eyes and tanned faces against the sun. It is a thrilling sight. There is no other moment like this moment. For soon the platoons are broken up by transfer. The family has matured and must be sent into the world. The individuals of this family are accepted into the larger community of the Marine Corps. So, the final parade is accompanied by sadness and regret, though it marks achievement of a difficult task and offers a future of more exciting things, and more difficult things.

That night Blaskewitz came to our tent street. He announced we would celebrate by running the gauntlet and ordered us to get our dress uniform belts. These belts were of thick, wide leather with a heavy brass buckle. We got them. He formed us into two lines on each side of the familiar thoroughfare. Each of us ran this long corridor of swinging belts. The slap of leather against our backs and thighs sped us along the way amid shouts of excitement and curses from those who were hit by over-enthusiastic men beside them. No one was hit much, because most ran very fast, and it is difficult to hit a man whizzing past. We enjoyed the game. Since everyone ran, there was no effort to beat anyone to death. It was something like a birthday party of many years ago when it was the custom to give the proper number of spanks to the guest of honor.

Within a few days, each got his orders, and boot camp was over. The end of this training meant, comparatively, much more freedom, and we entered into training of a broader sort. But in boot camp, we had learned the fundamentals. These fundamentals were to carry us over many tough spots and guide us in many strange situations. Without boot camp, we would not have

been Marines. We knew this and were proud to have gone through Parris Island.

We told Blaskewitz goodbye. We were sorry to leave him, and he was sorry to see us go. We were his platoon; we were the product of his genius, his patience, and his vocabulary. We were more fond of him than he was ever to know. And I suspect he was more attached to us than we ever knew. He had won our respect and praise.

Blaskewitz was a good DI. Our mothers would not have liked him.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Into the Tents of the Nomads

The Fleet Marine Force, United States Marine Corps, is an assault arm highly trained in the establishment of beachheads against an entrenched enemy and experienced in ship-to-shore assault operations.

It is trained and equipped for aggressive action. The nature of its work makes the Fleet Marine Force, and the divisions which comprise it, an organization designed to strike the enemy relentlessly in forward movements of unyielding pressure until the foe is destroyed. The FMF is not designed for long holding actions or great sweeping movements over large land masses. Such large-scale warfare is the job of the Army with its hordes of men. The FMF is too small for massive military operations. It is not designed for them. It is trained, equipped, and capable of penetrating beaches reached by sea convoy, capturing airfields, and holding beachheads until larger forces can arrive and occupy the land. This accomplished, the FMF withdraws and prepares for a new assault of the same nature. This activity is considered one of the more dangerous military maneuvers and can result in an exceedingly high loss of life. Because the assault against prepared land defenses from the sea is so complex, and



requires such speed of accomplishment and excellence of timing and coordination between land, sea, and air units, the FMF is a demanding organization which finds itself more at home in the brush than in barracks. It is not familiar with the easy ways of barrack life, or the restful slumbers of living death so often associated with peacetime military camps.

The Fleet Marine Force is on a wartime footing all the time. In our day, movement was often with little or no warning. We never knew for certain where we were going, or when we would return, if ever. Though the twenty-one years since I joined the FMF have brought many changes, I am sure the speed of movement is still the same. The concept of war was to hit hard, to advance and destroy the enemy.

Life in the FMF was primitive. Prior to World War II, and during that conflict, the FMF was an organization stripped of non-essentials, lean and tough, ready to fight anywhere at any time.

When I transferred from boot camp to the FMF by moving four blocks down the street, there were only two divisions. There were less than 40,000 men in the entire Marine Corps, and an effort was being made to bring these two divisions up to strength. The First Marine Division, to which I was assigned, was located on the east coast of America, and the Second Marine Division was on the west coast and scattered in the Far East.

I was sent to a new artillery unit in the process of being organized. This was the Fourth Battalion, Battery M, 11th Regiment, First Division, Fleet Marine Force, or, as it was commonly written, 4-M-11.

"I really like this outfit," I wrote home. "I think I hit it lucky. It is a new outfit and they took about twenty out of our platoon, so it's not like having to make friends all over again."

I wrote I would soon have furlough, as one group was already gone, and "when they get back, we take off." My parents had moved to Gadsden, Alabama, and I was anxious for them to see me in my Marine uniform.

While it was forming, 4-M-11 was located in barracks. These

were the World War I structures that had served so well. Now they were housing a new generation of Marines who would soon fight a different type battle from that fought in France during the Great War of 1917.

Once settled in our new quarters, we found we were no longer treated as boots, but accepted as equals, within the bounds of rank, and looked upon as Marines. We were subject to all the privileges of our rank, which was private. This meant all orders eventually filtered down to us, and we carried them out. It was heartening to realize we were foundation stones in so great an outfit and carried such basic responsibilities.

We drew more clothing, for we had little to wear. It was at this service—and that is just what it was—we learned of shortages in the military. The Marine Corps never seemed to have enough clothing. After a few years in the Corps, a Marine is able to build up a supply, but it takes time. We were doled out more underwear, socks, and a shirt. While in boot camp, we had been fitted with the green wool uniform, which is the dress uniform for winter. The fancy blues, which are worn by Marines on embassy duty, in Washington, and by some Marines on liberty, were not general issue to us. I never owned one of these uniforms. I liked the green uniform, and it was a little less colorful. Anyway, I had no place to keep another uniform, or any way to take care of it. So, I was not disappointed when I learned this fancy dress was not to be given us. We could buy it, if we wanted it. Along with the green uniform, we had gotten a heavy green overcoat, and in this way we were dressed for winter.

Dungarees, a green baggy coverall with USMC on the left breast pocket, is the working uniform, and the combat uniform. It is adjusted for climate by what you wear under it, and over it. For summer dress, khaki trousers were provided, and these with a khaki shirt, tie, web belt, and headpiece completed the uniform.

We had barely enough clothing to meet inspection. But as long as we did have, we were safe. There was an inspection of the barracks and personnel every Saturday morning. Until it was

over, we were at the mercy of the police sergeant. He was not a policeman, he was a janitor, who was responsible for the barracks and to whom a working detail was assigned daily. Just before inspection on Saturday morning about 11 o'clock, everybody worked for him, except high ranking NCOs . . . and, of course, commissioned officers.

My bunk was the top set of springs on a bunk bed located at the right of the hall entrance of our second-story room. All the bunk beds were lined along the wall on each side of the room. The top bunk is choice. Visitors seldom sit on it. It stays neat and clean. I did not realize it at the time, but I was in a fine position for inspections. Since everything must be done "smartly" in the Corps, the inspecting party—the colonel, major, captain, lieutenants, top sergeant, and police sergeant—would sweep through the door from the hall to the ringing command of "*Attention*" from the police sergeant. This great surge of brass, accompanied by the police sergeant, who was along to receive a dressing down should something be found amiss, could not get slowed down enough to see anything until it was well beyond my bunk. It was wonderful. We would all be standing as still and straight as ramrods, and they would thunder in like a visitation from on High. And they would be past me like a flash.

I will never forget the first inspection of this type. We had been driven like slaves by the loud, irritating voice of the police sergeant all morning. The hour had come. Little Jesus and his disciples were descending upon us. The inspection party clanked by on winged feet, the second lieutenants bringing up the rear. The brass began looking at the gear laid out on the bunks. Clothing and equipment had been set out in a rigid order on top of the green, wrinkle-free blankets. The group finished my row and crossed the room, coming back toward me on the other side of the room, looking at the men and beds there. Almost directly opposite me was a private of foreign extraction. I never did find out what stock he represented, but he was dark-skinned and always looked a little disorganized, plus a little dirty. He wasn't, but he looked that way.

In the inspection party was a major noted as a jackass. He

was an old maid with long years of service in the reserve. The Corps had recently recalled him to active service, thus gaining a well-meaning, but exacting fuss-budget. This gimlet-eyed demon ground to a halt at the bunk of Private Darkly—I'll call him that, as I have forgotten his name. Private Darkly had been caught smoking on guard duty a few days before and he had been warned not to repeat this serious offense. He had not been put in irons, because the NCO had thought him so new to the ways of the Corps, he would give him another chance.

Now Private Darkly was faced by this old maid in uniform, who looked for all the world like a Frenchman. The major had an olive complexion and straight black hair, parted in the middle. He had a thin line of a mustache and the bluish-purple face of a man with a heavy beard.

The major bent over the bunk of Private Darkly. "Look at this," he muttered to the clump of officers standing beside him as he fingered clothing on the bunk. "What is your name and rank?"

"Private Raymond Darkly, sir."

"Is this your underwear?" the major asked, picking up a pair of drawers with his thumb and forefinger and holding the garment out from him like a dead rat.

"Yes, sir."

"This is a dingy and wrinkled thing. It is not fit to be out for inspection. It should be white and pressed!" The major turned to the first sergeant. The first sergeant wrote down the words in a small notebook he carried especially for the purpose.

"Did you wash them?"

"Yes, sir, I did," Private Darkly answered. He did not appear happy.

"There is no excuse for this. It demonstrates a lack of care and attention to regulations. Give this man three days bread and water."

Private Darkly was taken aback, as were we all. The major swept on down the row of bunks, still talking to the colonel about the state of the underwear owned by Private Darkly. The group finally clattered out the door and was away.

We turned and packed our clothing back in the locker boxes

at the foot of the bunks. We felt Private Darkly had been dealt an injustice. Yet, he should have known better. Soon, the corporal of the guard came and took Private Darkly to the brig. We hated to see him go. We felt he had not been given a fair shake. But such things happened. It was a good warning and example for us. We tried to set aside a set of new clothing for inspection. But our stocks were limited. Some things we could hold in reserve for inspection use only, but not many. Older hands did this. They just had a set of clothing they used for nothing but inspections. We didn't have enough to operate that way. And it made life dangerous.

After inspection was liberty call.

Several of us from old Platoon 133 had a weekend pass, a small amount of money, and a burning desire to see the outside world. We dressed in our new green uniform, or greens, as they were called, and appeared before the corporal of the guard to sign out. We were given an inspection, for Marines are inspected as they leave on liberty—no crumb gets out; the uniform has to be clean and pressed, belt buckle glistening, belt polished, shoes gleaming, hair cut, face shaved—we showed our liberty cards and walked out free men—within a limited meaning of that word.

Mike, the giant of men, was with us. Private Victor Manuel, a feather merchant who would have fitted right in at an old ladies' tea party, for he was cherubic of face and talked knowingly of music and art, was along. Private Francis Radek, of pool hall heritage, came, too, and the final member was Bob Kipp, with whom I had first spoken at my first breakfast in boot camp.

The approved method of getting off the island was to hitchhike. Officers were gracious in this matter and would stop for you if you gave a snappy enough salute. Officers' vehicles were marked by a distinguishing tag and with only slight training our youthful eyes could identify this mark of rank at considerable distance. It took a dedicated second lieutenant to drive by a group frozen in salute beside the road. These junior officers must have felt all privates worshiped their bars, for the roadsides were lined with liberty-bound Marines clicking heels to-

gether and bringing right hands up to the hand salute as these officers passed.

In this way we got across the bridge and on civilian soil.

In Beaufort, we caught the Savannah bus and settled back for the long ride. At least, it seemed long, though it really took little time compared with the effort to reach civilization required by some stations. And finally we were dumped at the bus station among real people—the first we had seen for weeks. We were overwhelmed by the city. We looked upon it, and it was good. We walked, admiring the sights and sounds of the town. At that time it was not the roaring city of today; it was rather sleepy, had pigeons, and tolled bells, very beautiful bells, occasionally. There was an air of peace and of a relaxed way of life. A way of life I had known in the towns of the South where I had visited and lived. Savannah reminded me of Marion, Alabama, where I had visited my grandfather during quiet summers and where I watched the cadets of famous old Marion Military Institute in a time when there were no paved roads in that whole village. The two places had the same feel. They had atmosphere. That is more than can be said for most American towns.

Savannah was the only town in the United States where beggars sold contraceptives instead of pencils. At least, it is the only one I was ever in that did. Our little group had hardly walked three blocks before an elderly merchant holding a cigar box in one hand and leaning on a walking stick with the other called out to us. We stopped and he hobbled up and waved the cigar box under our eyes.

"Two for a quarter," he said, his lips dusty with dried snuff. We looked in, worldly and tough.

"Youse sell these?" Mike asked with a tone of shock.

"Yeh," the rotting pile replied, pushing the box at us.

Private Manuel, his cherubic face the picture of innocence, asked, "What th' hell for?"

"They must be secondhanded, coming from this character," Private Radek added.

We were in the middle of the sidewalk and honest citizens of Savannah were pressing by us, hurrying to supper, or wher-

ever they went at dusk in 1941. All of us were embarrassed by the discussion of such merchandise on the public sidewalk. We began to move away, and the old beggar hobbled off in the opposite direction, still holding the open cigar box out for inspection.

"He must be nuts," Mike muttered.

"Let's get a bottle of rum," I suggested, "and split it." I liked cuba libres at the time. They had been popular in Florida, and during my college years I had mixed many of them. The mixing was an attraction. Rum, Coca-Cola, ice, lime or lemon juice were required. A number of them would guarantee a huge hangover, but I had always thought this was the penalty for drinking.

We discussed this. It was decided rum was cheaper than whiskey, which it was. And we bought a bottle of it. We found a roadhouse, filled a table and called for ice, lemons, and Cokes. The die was cast. We had not touched alcohol in many weeks. Such a state of affairs does something to a man. The drinks were good. The Coke was sweet. Conversation was fine. We became drunk. I remember looking at the clock. It showed exactly 8 P.M. I do not remember anything else; not until 5 A.M., when I suddenly came to as I drank coffee with Mike, Private Manuel, and two strange Marines, who, I learned by listening to the conversation, were giving us a ride back to Parris Island. One of the strangers, whose name I never knew, asked me if I wanted whiskey in my coffee. He had uncorked a bottle and was filling his cup, mixing the hot coffee with a spoon as he did so, talking all the while.

I watched, revolted by the whole thing. "No, thank you," I managed, "I never drink."

"Well, you ought to have some of this." He tasted the mixture. Whiskey fumes surrounded us as the heat evaporated the alcohol. "Nothing better than coffee royale . . . especially early in the morning."

I sat, silent.

"Sure you don't want some?" He took a big, noisy slurp from the top of the steaming mass.

"Not for me . . . I just like hot coffee . . . nothing else . . . not now, anyway." I ordered another cup.

Evidently, I had been guided by my unconscious during the night. My conscious had not been present. I knew that. The switching off of my mind at precisely 8 P.M. fascinated me. I could remember everything up until that moment. I had looked at the clock. I could still see it, clear as a bell, a big round wall clock. The then unconscious had taken over. I have never known exactly what happened during those hours afterward. It was an eerie feeling to return to the world and find myself calmly seated, drinking coffee. There was no indication anyone realized I had been away. Either they had been as drunk as I, and couldn't tell the difference, or I had managed to move and speak fairly well. I resolved it would never happen again. It never did. I never blacked out again. I decided a first liberty celebration could be excused for certain excesses. But I have never felt certain about that.

We got back safely. I was glad.

A few days after we joined 4-M-11, our group was called before the first sergeant, a quiet, efficient career man who could curse in a conversational tone, and questioned as to our ability to use a typewriter. The First Sergeant's name was Abner Graves. His hair was seeded with gray, he was of medium height and had a southern drawl. No one seemed to know anything about typewriters. I told him I could type with two fingers, but could not spell very well. The others said they could do neither. Graves shook his head and dismissed us.

A day or two later, I was called to the first sergeant's office by the police sergeant, who was deathly afraid of Graves and, therefore, made the summons sound as if I were to be hanged for an unknown reason.

When I arrived, Graves asked if I would like to help in the office. I told him I didn't know whether or not I would be of help. "I hope you can find somebody else. I don't think I can do it."

"You'll work out fine. There are a lot of advantages here. It will help your career in the Corps." He patted my shoulder in a fatherly way and smiled sweetly.



I felt trapped. "Maybe you can find someone else?"

"Report in the morning after breakfast," he said. "I'll notify your sergeant."

I reported the next morning. For two weeks I struggled with the morning report, pasting an endless string of directives in a book, running errands and retyping orders. Graves would allow no messy copy. The slightest error, like the misspelling of an officer's name, meant I had to do the work all over again in its entirety. I worked my fingers to the bone. Graves' kindly eyes and relentless supervision bound me to the metal chair.

In the same office was the captain's desk. He was an officer of the highest type. A man of great culture and a graduate of Virginia Military Institute, he knew the military deeply and well. I looked upon him in awe. I would have followed him anywhere, and the men of the battery felt the same way. He never raised his voice in anger; he was just to the wicked. He put his men first and he demanded his officers do the same. A native of Virginia, he had the qualities of Robert E. Lee. I never heard an unkind word spoken of him, or ever heard of him doing an unkind thing. Even men who violated the rules and were brought before him for punishment went with full knowledge his ruling would be fair, and, if anything, would be adjusted to the advantage of mercy. His name was Campbell Drake.

After more than a week of unending monotony before the typewriter—and almost daily cross-examinations by the police sergeant, who had bottomless curiosity concerning events within the office and gossip thereof—I determined I must get out of the trap in which I was caught. Earlier, Graves had talked in his fatherly way about my future, indicating that within thirty years I would be able to make first sergeant, if not warrant officer. Though this vision of mounting the heights was breathtaking at the time, the battle with the typewriter dimmed it somewhat. I wanted to advance as rapidly as possible; yet, I did not want to be a clerk. I wanted to be with my fellow warriors in the field, where the smoke and dust of battle brought rewards of their own. I had not joined to use a typewriter. It was too much like school . . . I had fled from that. Somehow, the job wounded my pride. I felt

like a weakling, pecking away at a typewriter and being read off daily for errors I somehow could not avoid.

This feeling continued to mount within my breast. I envied the outdoor activities of my friends and felt guilty . . . isolated, really . . . from them by the office job. So, one day, when Graves was out on an errand of high importance to headquarters, I struck. Captain Drake was at his desk. I gathered courage, rose from my typewriter, stood at attention and requested permission to speak with him on a personal matter.

He looked a little surprised as he granted the request and gave me his full attention. I told him of my feeling about the job and ended with a request for transfer back to the field. We discussed the matter, and I told him I felt I would not be happy anywhere else. I must not serve thirty years before a typewriter.

About the time we had completed our exchange, Graves returned and seated himself at his field desk. Captain Drake informed him I had requested transfer. It was at this point I found I had made a major error of diplomacy, not to mention the fact I had violated the rules of rank. I had, in effect and in reality, gone over the head of the first sergeant. Graves stared at me with hard eyes that withered me before my typewriter.

"This is the first I have heard of it, sir," he said to Captain Drake. "He told me he thought he could improve and do the job, and he was satisfied." Graves glared at me again. "Isn't that right?"

"Yes, sir," I said, scared to death. "But I have changed my mind."

We all worked in silence. I pecked away at the typewriter, barely able to see the keys, my mind in turmoil. I would catch hell when the captain left the room. Soon he did. Graves turned to me and struck like a coiled rattler. I learned it was only through his good graces I would not be shot at sunrise, or cast into the brig for life.

After he had cooled down some, he became his fatherly self. He saw I had made up my mind. Of course, such a thing made little difference. He could have kept me there forever. But he wasn't that type. He made a deal with me.

"You find somebody to take your place. If you do . . . and if he can do the job . . . you can be transferred. If you can't, you stay right here . . . with me."

"Yes, sir," I said, hoping a Power higher than both of us would come to my aid.

There were several possibilities. The Cobra was one. I consulted with him. He was firm as a rock. He wouldn't do it. No amount of appeal to his love of intellectual matters would move him.

"To hell with it," he said.

"You don't know what you are doing," I argued. "Think what it will mean to your career. You'll learn office procedures and how to be a battery commander."

"Hummm," The Cobra said. "I think I'll go to the slop chute and get a beer." He got up and wandered off. I sat on my bunk and glared at the wall.

"Why don't you? A beer will do you good." He was standing at the door. We were good friends. How could I refuse? I went with him.

At the slop chute, a haven offering beer for enlisted men, at that time I think it was ten or fifteen cents a bottle . . . I surveyed the customers. Who was drunk enough to be weak? No one. They were too broke. They were happy, but not without their defenses.

We ordered a beer by the simple process of standing in line and getting one when our turn came. We took it over to a table and sat down. It was good. The Cobra was delivering a discourse on trajectory of artillery shells. I paid little attention. I was searching for a replacement. None of the happy throng fitted the qualifications. The main qualification was complex: Graves had to approve of the selection. Graves had come to respect my work. This was sickening. My eyes wandered about. The Cobra droned on, occasionally throwing in a Chinese phrase to keep in practice.

Herbert Dumas and his sidekick thundered up, laughing and holding four beers. They divided them among us and sat down. A great feeling of peace descended upon me. Private Dumas was an educated man. He had been honored with a diploma by

one of our great Southern universities. Now he was a private in the Corps. Probably burning with ambition to rise above the common herd. I drank my beer. I must not move too swiftly.

"Dumas," I said. "I am your friend."

"Yes, Hoppy, I know it. Have a beer."

"I have one . . . and I'll get the next round. How do you like the battery?"

"Fine."

"That's wonderful." I paused to allow loyalty to the battery to develop to patriotic pitch. "I'll play the *Field Artillery Song* on the juke organ. I'm musically inclined." I went over to the machine and deposited a nickel and punched the proper button. I went the second mile and also played the *Marine Hymn*. I returned and relaxed, sipping beer. The Cobra was trying to explain trajectory of artillery shells to Dumas' sidekick, a private named Ralph Weeds, who had been employed in a brewery before joining the Corps. He was a large individual with a lantern jaw, but of meek spirit. He was not aggressive, but jolly. He had known Dumas from earlier days: I never understood the details, though I think they had arrived on the same bus from Savannah.

The music filled the room, a background to the babble of voices. It was inspiring. About the middle of the *Marine Hymn*, I turned to Dumas. "Have you ever considered working for Graves?"

"I thought that was where you worked. Aren't you still in there?"

"Oh, yes," I said and swallowed some beer from my bottle. "But he is not satisfied with me. I have been dispatched to find somebody who has education and who can type. I remember you said you typed a long thesis in college in order to save funds for beer."

"That's right. But I have never worked in an office."

"It's not necessary. Graves says he is satisfied with work which only passes his requirements, which are low," I lied. "Of course, you must be able to express yourself. . . . And you deal with the officers considerably."

Dumas was listening. I was on pins and needles. "I'll get us

all a round of beer," I said. I left the table and got in line. I must not move too quickly, or he would suspect a trap, or something equally dishonest. I returned with four beers.

"Why don't you talk with Graves. This is a good opportunity before the word gets out. It is a job with freedom and great possibilities. If Graves were not anxious to fire me, I would be happy to work on. But he wants someone who can handle the paperwork of the battery without his constant supervision. You know . . . someone with executive ability. I have none. I bungle the morning reports."

Dumas lighted up a cigar and leaned back. "I may do that," he said.

I grew faint clutching my beer. "I'll tell him you are dropping by the office tomorrow. What about that?"

"Well, all right."

"He may not take you. But I'll put in a good word."

"Okay, let me know when to see him."

"Oh, I will. I'll let you know as soon as I've talked with Graves. Here, I'll get us another round of beer." I could see the sunrise. There was only one more problem, maybe two: Would Graves take him? And would he take the job?

"Why don't they play something besides that damned *Field Artillery Song*?" The Cobra muttered.

"Oh, it's a good song," I said. "It gets you . . . right here."

"Hummm. Why don't you buy some potato chips?"

"I got the beer. Remember?"

The Cobra rose. "I'll get them in that case," he said quietly and took out his purse—he kept his change in a purse—and fished for a nickel.

The next day I did not waste any time in telling Graves I had found just the man for him. A man who was a great improvement over me. He could type. He could spell. But he was shy about these accomplishments. However, I said, he wanted to come in and talk about it.

"Have him here after chow," Graves grumped.

I did. I wasn't present during the conference. But I received word I had been transferred to other duty. This was how I came

to be assigned to duty even more complex than the typewriter . . . and even further removed from my limited talents. I was ordered to become learned in the aiming circle. This is a device that aims cannons. It depends upon proper mathematical calculations, compass reading, levels determined by air bubbles in tubes of water, a stripped stick in the ground, and careful turning of a number of knobs. But I did not begin work on that right away. The battery was practice-firing air-cooled .50-caliber machine guns at targets towed by an airplane. I joined in this fun with a happy heart.

On our floor of the barrack, we had a number of old hands. One corporal was of particular interest. He had four hash marks, which indicated at a glance he had served at least sixteen years. The word was he had never risen above corporal during these weary enlistments, but had, on occasion, fallen from grace and served as private, first class, and private—only to rise to corporal once again.

Beer was allowed in the barrack every night except Friday. This was in preparation for Saturday inspection. But on all other occasions, beer, which many bought by the case, could be consumed in the same room in which we slept.

This corporal, who was short of stature, red-faced and elderly, had false teeth and weak kidneys. This is not to discredit him, for his career had been one of trial and considerable error. To smooth the rough path of life, he had turned to beer, a beverage he drank in preference to water and other liquids. He was something of a quiet character who bothered no one and worked as best he could. Corporal Fred Minus was often host at a beer party at his bunk. At these functions, which were held at one end of the room—his bunk was the last of the row on my side of the building—were happy affairs filled with reminiscences of past drunks and liberties, laughter and talk of the future. It was during these gatherings major problems of the Corps were solved and commissioned officers analyzed.

Corporal Minus would preside, and the guests, all of whom had contributed to the purchase of the beer, would seat them-

selves on the edges of the lower bunks to form a little circle with the open case of beer at their feet. As the beer cans were drained, they were placed on the floor for ash trays, or returned to the case. As time passed and as the group made its way through the second case of beer, conversation usually had become so interesting Corporal Minus, and sometimes others, could not tear themselves away. In these instances, they would find an empty beer can, turn their backs, and answer nature's insistent call by refilling whatever number of cans the situation might require.

There were sworn statements that on occasion, and in the excitement and depth of these global discussions, cans that had been filled by participants who could not tear themselves away from the session, were emptied for the second time. Run through twice, as the saying went. I did not believe this, but it was not beyond the realm of possibility. In fact, I had noticed there was considerable carelessness about where the empties and refills were placed. Often they were put in a case from which fresh, cool beer was being drawn. Since a number of cans would be opened at one time, the chance of a wrong choice was far from remote.

For this reason, I drank beer at the slop chute. At this sanctuary there was no possibility of tragic errors of the nature described.

Corporal Minus, we also learned, frequently wet his bed as the result of extended beer parties, and this matter was brought to the attention of Graves by the police sergeant, who had noticed pools of liquid in the sack, or bed, of this worthy. These accidents did not occur too frequently. However, Corporal Minus was ordered to get himself under control, and the socials at his sack were ordered halted.

Corporal Minus often journeyed to Beaufort for good food. He enjoyed hamburgers with his beer and had found a restaurant that served both. He had a sense of humor of a quiet sort, and was not beyond pulling little jokes that occasionally startled those who did not know him.

There was the story—and I'm sure it's true, because it sounded so much like the corporal—that he went into the Beaufort res-

taurant and sat in the middle of the long counter it had down one side. This was not a plush establishment, but none of them were at that time. Seated on one of the low stools at the counter, Corporal Minus, his face a healthy pink and his eyes glassy and pink also, was approached by a waitress. She was a farm woman, now in the city of Beaufort to engage in the healthful employment offered by this quaint café.

"Whatta you want?" she asked Corporal Minus, who was seated erect, polished and silent at the bar of the counter.

"Gimme uh 'berger and uh bottle uh beer," he replied with a broad smile that wrinkled the corners of his eyes and shed warmth on the drawn, unpainted face of the waitress.

She turned and disappeared into the kitchen, where she stayed until the hamburger had been prepared, personally. This required some little time and produced fumes and smoke that overwhelmed the small exhaust fan above the entrance.

The woman returned, placed the dish bearing the hamburger before Corporal Minus and turned to get his beer from a soft drink cooler.

Corporal Minus removed his false teeth and clamped them into the hamburger on the plate, where they gleamed whitely at the woman's back.

She turned and handed him his beer, not noticing the teeth clamped into the steaming hamburger.

"Here," Minus said, smiling toothlessly in his warm way, as he pushed the plate toward her. "You eat the hamburger. I'll drink the beer."

I received a ten-day furlough for Thanksgiving and visited my parents in Gadsden, Alabama, returning to Parris Island during the early days of December 1941.

Work of the battery was progressing more slowly than usual due to such furloughs and to continued organizational efforts that brought in more boots as they finished training.

Negotiations with the Japanese were in progress in Washington. Notes were exchanged and the situation grew more tense. But we didn't pay much attention to these developments. We rarely



saw a newspaper and seldom listened to a radio. Our world was a limited one of hard training as we settled down to life in the Marine Corps. The world was out there somewhere, but we didn't pay much attention to it. Most of us expected war soon; it was our business now, but we didn't know when.

As a new unit, we were far from ready to fight, though we didn't realize it at the time. As far as we were concerned, we could have advanced on the enemy, whoever he might be, at an instant's notice. Our battery took many trips into local forests, practiced setting up the 155-mm howitzers and the air-cooled .50s we had for antiaircraft fire. These machine guns were on heavy tripods. They could be aimed at the sky in hopes of bringing down an enemy plane, should one attack the howitzers.

During these field trips, Bennett Hirst and I practiced with the aiming circle. This device is similar to a transit theodolite used by surveyors. With it, the gunners are given settings for their sights and the howitzers aimed to shell a given point ahead.

Our instructions up to this time had left much to be desired as far as I was concerned. I was nervous about having the responsibility of pointing four huge guns, when I wasn't sure of what I was doing. Of course, we weren't firing the guns, but I knew we would, someday. It was the "someday" that worried me. I was not very good at mathematics, and the aiming circle involves some of that. It was considered delicate and had to be handled with care. It was treated with reverence, and Hirst and I were responsible for its welfare and safety. We took turns carrying it and operating it. Progress was slow, as far as I was concerned. Hirst did better with it, I believed.

Besides these trips back and forth to the woods to set up the guns, we practiced loading and unloading ammunition. The battery used large trucks, called FWDs, which had numerous gearshifts forward and backward. They were equipped, too, with cable winches fore and aft. These winches were wound with strong wire cable. With them, an FWD could do many things. If a truck got stuck, the cable was unwound and wrapped around the nearest tree of any size. Then the FWD would wind in its own cable and pull itself from the hole.

The cables were also good for pulling the guns from bogs. They were used frequently for this work. We seldom set up in a cleared area; it was usually in heavy brush on soft ground. The FWDs pulled the guns and carried the men and ammunition needed to service them. Residents of Port Royal and Beaufort became accustomed to seeing us move through their villages on these expeditions to the forest. They must have wondered what we were doing, as we did.

The junior officers were as new as we were, in most cases, and they were being trained along with us. Without exception, these men were fine leaders, and gentlemen. It was not until near the end of World War II that I began running across types that could not have been considered highest quality manhood and worthy of their rank. But the toll of war had reduced the ranks of the outstanding, and the Corps had to take what it could get.

Years after the war I ran into some of these junior officers under whom I had served as a private. They were lieutenant colonels, but other than this, they had changed little.

So, as the dark shadow of war fell over us, we trained, worked, and lived as the professional Marines that we were. For this we received \$21 in cash, minus deductions for insurance.

Before I had gone on my Thanksgiving furlough, there had been a payday. We stood in a long line, approaching the small wooden table behind which sat Captain Drake, Sergeant Graves, and a first lieutenant, as our names were called. We were paid every two weeks, rather than once a month, so, in theory, we received \$10 on one payday, and \$11 on another.

On this day, one of our dollars was paid in silver: two fifty-cent pieces. After receiving our money, we moved to another table manned by a second lieutenant, who took our Red Cross contributions. Each contributor was carefully noted by name. It was said these names would be checked when promotions came up. Since the Marine Corps had so thoughtfully changed one of my dollars, I deposited fifty cents for the Red Cross, and my name was duly checked.

I will not say I gave with a cheerful heart. The three beers

and one bag of potato chips the half dollar represented were dear to me. But, then, the money was for "our boys" in the armed forces. I would have been something of a heel had I not given, wouldn't I? So, I placed the silver on the worn, green table, and left. I never saw it again.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Striking of the Tents

Several of us biding our time on a Sunday afternoon in the slop chute did not learn of the Japanese strike against Pearl Harbor immediately.

An icy wind was blowing across Parris Island from the sea on December 7, 1941. We had sought sanctuary and the warmth of good fellowship within the walls of this temple, where the foam of beer tossed beneath waves of lighthearted conversation. Two days before, I had been issued a warrant making me a private first class. I had good cause to celebrate and to feel all was right with the world. Only the formation of a new battery and the unsettled condition of the world would have been enough to cause such rapid promotion. These factors had combined to lift me upward into a position of eminence, if not authority. World conditions, it could be truthfully stated, had brought me a promotion that ordinarily did not come until near the end of the first enlistment, if then. So, the one red chevron was mine; I was no longer a mere private, but a hardened warrior whose privacy was first class.

At this time, the Marine Corps awarded warrants upon promotion. These were formal documents signed by the battalion commander citing the "appointment" and the regulation under

which it was issued. My warrant made me Pfc of the line, which meant, among other things, I would hold this rank through transfers to other units of the line, or regular Marine Corps, which had to do with fighting. The "temporary" rating meant, simply, I could be demoted without the formality of a court-martial.

With this warrant, my meteoric rise in the profession of arms which was never to surge beyond buck sergeant of the line, began on the very eve of war. Several of us had been thus promoted. The unusual action on the part of the high command caused gum beating among some of the older hands. Many of these diligent and loyal NCOs had completed one or more enlistments before achieving what we had experienced in a matter of weeks. Naturally, there was a feeling among some that justice had been inattentive to their own cases when the promotion lists were compiled up yonder. But there was hope rain would fall on the just and the unjust alike, and they too, would soon receive more stripes.

Though some were bitter in the feeling undue favor had been shed upon us, most managed to swallow this event without visible distaste. What had happened was more necessity than favor. Certainly, it was more necessity than ability on our part. Promotions in any number always had wide effect, anyway. It was only a matter of time until all were to move upward.

Within a week or ten days after receiving Pfc ratings, many of us stood oral and written examinations for corporal. I passed this trial in ninth place in the regiment, thus being ninth in line for promotion to sergeant in that body of men.

On December 19, 1941, I received my corporal's warrant. Ordinarily, this document was presented with much fanfare at a formation of the battery. I had witnessed such a ceremony on two occasions. The captain would read the warrant as the recipient stood at attention before him in the presence of the entire command. He then handed the precious paper over to the man, endowing him with such authority as a noncommissioned officer as the warrant might designate.

In the Marine Corps, especially in the Fleet Marine Force, the noncommissioned officer is the backbone of the service.

Upon him rests the responsibility of getting work done and carrying out commands in the field. The various NCO ranks carried real authority, which was supported in word and deed by commissioned officers in the First Marine Division. The chain of command was a sacred thing. It was respected as one of the higher forms of taboo and worshiped. So, when promotions were granted—rare as they were—it was an occasion to be noted by all hands.

In these early days of World War II, an order from a corporal or sergeant carried the same weight as a command from a commissioned officer, and was looked upon with the same respect, if not love. This system made for a highly efficient organization in which discipline was strong. Later in the war, I was to observe the breaking down of this method in other units, much to the detriment of the service. As the better officers were killed, go-day-wonders supplied the gaps left in the ranks of first and second lieutenants. These naïve, inexperienced, and poorly trained individuals bypassed their NCOs to deliver orders directly to the privates and Pfc's. The result was inevitable. It became more and more difficult for NCOs to handle men who began to expect to receive orders only from the brass, and discipline and efficiency suffered.

The issuance of printed warrants ceased soon after the outbreak of World War II. Newly appointed NCOs were merely notified of a higher rank by their commanding officers. When noncommissioned rank becomes a means of receiving a pay raise only, and does not mean a higher level of authority and responsibility, it becomes a weak, empty thing. Experienced officers will admit good NCOs are rare and valuable human beings. At the outset of World War II, the Marine Corps had the finest NCOs in the world. Most of them had been in the service many hitches. They knew their jobs and the jobs of those above them. These men guarded their small rights and privileges jealously, and rightly so. In return, they gave responsible, dedicated service for pitiful pay. Intelligent junior officers looked upon them as wise in the ways of the military and often sought their advice. Many commissioned

officers have avoided painful experiences by following the example and wisdom of senior NCOs who served beneath them.

When I received my corporal's warrant, the ceremony of calling men front and center to receive such promotions had been halted. But we still were given the printed document signed by the battalion commander. The corporal's warrant was more flowery and firmly worded than the private, first class, warrant I had been given. The wording of the directive it bore is interesting, for it reflects much of the spirit of the noncommissioned ranks of that day and their relationship to the commissioned officer. For the benefit of readers who have never seen or heard of such warrants, the following is what my corporal's warrant stated:

N.M.C. 115e—A&I

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

(Marine Emblem)

Battery "M", Fourth Battalion,  
11th Marines, First Marine Division  
Fleet Marine Force, Marine Barracks,  
Parris Island, South Carolina

19 December, 1941

Thomas G. Gallant, Jr. (322046)

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by the direction of the Major General Commandant, is hereby appointed a

CORPORAL

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in the UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS, and he is therefore carefully and diligently to discharge the duties of that position by doing and performing all manner of things thereunto belonging. I do strictly charge and require all Non-commissioned Officers and others under his command to be obedient to his orders, and he is to observe and follow such orders and directions from time to time as he shall receive from his Commanding Officer or other superior officers set over him, according to the rules and discipline of the Navy.

## TEMPORARY

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Authority: MGC 1tr 2165-15/5-1 over AV-ajc, dated 14 November, 1941.

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(Signed) Melvin E. Fuller  
 Major. . . . ., USMC  
 Commanding 4th Bn., 11th Marines

No.     -9-      
 Lowest Number of Same  
 Date Takes Rank

(Original)

It must have been midafternoon when our group found the country was at war. The first message we received at our slop chute headquarters was garbled. It was based on hearsay and the messenger wasn't certain where the attack had occurred. "Some harbor," he said. "It was on the radio."

We decided to go to the barrack and find out the facts. We determined this move after some conversation, and plunged into the winter wind.

We found only a few men in the room. They were calm. A card game was in progress. Corporal Minus was on his sack, but awake. He told us the details. It was Pearl Harbor. He remembered it well.

"There is a fine bar in Honolulu," Corporal Minus recalled. "And the climate is mild. They keep a lot of warships there, as it is a permanent base for repair and refitting."

There was no doubt in our minds we would leave soon. Maybe tomorrow. The rest of the night was spent in speculation. We heard furloughs had been canceled and men away from the base recalled. Live ammunition was issued for guard duty and new posts established.

We were excited by the prospect of adventure ahead. There was no doubt we would fight the Japanese. The great sea distances called for ship-to-shore operations. The old hands began spinning tales about World War I and the campaigns of Latin America. We listened with renewed respect and attention.

The next morning we were ordered to load into the FWDs and



we moved in a convoy across the bridge through Port Royal and Beaufort. As we passed slowly through Beaufort, the people downtown waved and shouted at us. "Get the Japs," they said, waving their arms. We waved back and thoroughly enjoyed the display of affection. It was the first time I had ever seen anyone in Beaufort smile. The women blew kisses at us and the men stood on the street shouting to us. It was a great display of patriotism and it made us wonder why they never allowed their love for us to show in the past. But we knew they were restrained. We were glad there was something that would move them to speak to us.

We drove out of the city. We didn't know where we were going. The citizens of Beaufort, I'm sure, thought we were on our way to Japan. The big trucks finally stopped at the ruins of an old fort. We got out and were formed into ranks. Then we were allowed to stand at ease while a first lieutenant read a long paper on the history of the fort. I thought this was a little out of keeping with the times, but the ways of the Marine Corps are mysterious. After the historical outline, which seemed to last for hours, we were allowed to inspect the ruins.

Shortly after sundown, we drove back through Beaufort. It was dark. It would have been a great disappointment to those people to have known we didn't go after the Japanese after all, but slipped back to Parris Island under cover of darkness.

Perhaps we went to all that trouble in case spies were watching us. If there were, they sent out confused messages that night. But we had heartened Beaufort. It would be safe against aggression, because the Marines had gone to protect them and the tight little isle of Parris. At least, that is what they must have believed. And it was better that they did.

Shortly after the first of January 1942, we left Parris Island by truck convoy, heading for New River, North Carolina. It was the depths of winter. We wore our greens, overcoats and gloves. This was not much protection against the frigid air whipped into a gale by the moving trucks. Drivers were in open cabs with only a windshield to deflect the wind. It was required that NCOs ride up front with them in the event the drivers should need help, or

fall asleep. In this way, protected only by canvas over the truck beds, and not even that for the drivers and their watchdog NCOs, we moved over the deserted roads of South and North Carolina.

We went through Charleston, South Carolina, in early afternoon, the bitter wind against our faces as the FWDs thundered behind a police escort. The route was designed to avoid as much traffic as possible and the miserable trip was one of bleak landscapes and suffering. Occasionally, we would stop at a little town, the trucks going to various service stations for gasoline. We used these infrequent stops—for the trucks carried 90 gallons of gasoline—to try to get warm and find hot food.

We spent the night in a park at Myrtle Beach, near the state line of South Carolina. We slept on the ground under shelter halves. A cold wind from the sea swept over us and a light flurry of snow spotted the wet earth. Bonfires did little good and we ate cold rations from cans. At the first streak of a gray dawn, we were in our elephantine vehicles and moving once again.

We arrived at New River, North Carolina, near the hamlet of Jacksonville, in darkness and pitched camp in a light snowfall. We were allowed to eat in a mess hall, which was a smoky tent with wet sawdust floor. The roaring field stoves provided some warmth, but not enough to really give relief from our icy, open-air journey. Our canteen cups were filled with boiling coffee. We stood inside the primitive shelter listening to the flames of the ovens, thawing our hands by holding the hot canteen cups. The black liquid, laced with canned cream, was like nectar. We seared our lips, already chapped and raw from the wind, as we sipped the strong, sweet liquid and savored its warmth with our bodies.

The camp was a godforsaken hole reached by rutted roads and enclosed by tall pines, gaunt oaks, and thick underbrush. Its flapping tents and frontier appearance would have fitted it for an Alaskan gold rush camp of another century. Bonfires were built more for light than any warmth they might provide in the wind. We got no rest. Working in gloom of night pierced by the red glow of the fires, we loaded more equipment aboard the

trucks. Our clothing became scented with pine smoke. Our faces, sore and red from the lash of the wind's icy whip, burned with a thousand needles of pain. I was tired, dirty and uncomfortable, cold and dejected, bleary-eyed and hungry.

"Jesus S. Christ, this is a pitiful, stinking hole," Corporal Minus cried, waving a can of beer at the sky. He always carried beer in his pack, and sometimes in his canteen.

The Cobra was standing near us, hunched in his overcoat, head bent toward the ground. "It is cold as hell . . . some second lieutenant must have found it."

"He was probably lost," I muttered.

"That's the only way he could have found it. What puzzles me is what was he doing here in the first place . . . before he got lost."

"We'll be getting out soon. Else we'll be frozen." I was ready to go right then. "They say we're pulling out as soon as we're loaded."

"Minus is loaded now," The Cobra said. "How does he drink beer in this weather?"

"He says it clears his head." The wind was in gusts now, each blast like a knife.

"You mean he said, 'It clears the head.'"

The Cobra had made his little joke. I didn't argue. Both versions were right.

About 4 A.M., we pulled out, bouncing over deep ruts, motors churning, and headed north into more snow. I was in the front seat with the driver. I had resigned myself to death by freezing. This would be quicker than in the back, I thought. Jay Strumble was at the wheel. A farmboy from Georgia, he liked trucks. He was a good driver. Quiet. He had a sense of humor and smoked cigars. Now he was fighting the gear shift, moving through the innumerable forward speeds, as we plowed over the rough dirt road. We could converse only in shouts. So we said nothing. I had to stay awake to see that he did not go to sleep. He had to stay awake to drive. It wasn't very interesting work. We got to the main highway and paused. I swung down to check the

howitzer we were towing. It was still with us. I got back in and we moved out once again.

At 8 P.M. that same day we crawled into Norfolk, Virginia. The weather had grown more bitter. The streets were covered with ice and our speed was reduced to a creep. Each time the brakes were applied the heavy guns behind our trucks began a silent, deadly slide—tons of cold steel slipping on ice toward parked cars along the curb. I watched our gun with bloodshot eyes. It was doing pretty well. Still straight. We crawled forward. A cross light caught us with a red signal. Strumble applied brakes. The gun began its slide. A taxi began passing us on the right side, unaware of the gun's motion. The driver looked up at us in the open cab. The gun missed his car and came to rest.

We stopped in the middle of the street, leaving lanes open on each side. Officers in a jeep drove along the convoy.

"We'll stop here for about thirty minutes. We are getting permission for everybody to go into the post office and thaw out," a second lieutenant shouted.

"Ain't that nice," Strumble said to me. "I'd a thought they'd pick the icehouse."

We warmed up in the post office. While there, we learned we had only about twenty more miles to go. We were heading for an Army camp near Virginia Beach, Camp Pendleton. We would sleep in barracks that night.

"Army barracks are always warm and tootsie cozy," a voice in the back of our truck said. They started singing about it:

"Keep your tootsies cozy,  
Army dear;  
The Marines are coming,  
Never fear, never fear."

We pulled into Camp Pendleton at about 10 P.M. We found bunks and hit the hay. The doctor came through and ordered all the windows opened. We opened the windows. The frigid wind tore through the room.

"Sleeping in a hot room will give all you guys pneumonia,"

Sergeant Graves muttered, as he headed for his private quarters at the center of the building.

"No damned germ could live in me," The Cobra growled. "I'm too cold."

The next day was Saturday. We had formation and inspection in the snow. Following this routine, we worked until 4 P.M. getting ready to move again. We were scheduled to journey into a convenient wood for several days of maneuvers. As part of the "Red Army" we were to defend the beach against other Marines who were to land from transports at sea.

After 4 P.M. we were allowed liberty and immediately struck out for Virginia Beach, which we found nearly deserted. A summer resort offering a broad beach of white sand, this cluster of hotels and cabins was closed for the winter. We managed to find a place offering warmth and food. Here we dropped anchor. The Cobra, Mike, and I were together and, with the exception of a man and his wife, we were the only customers. Though the town was empty, it offered a taste of civilization which we savored after our long trip. We just relaxed, ate, and listened to the juke box.

Before dawn the next day, we were moving through snow into the forest. Evidently, the colonel had found a suitable bog for us to enter, and we did so under gloomy skies. The guns were set up and Hirst and I got the aiming circle out, leveled and ready for use. No fires were allowed. We ate a cold, tasteless breakfast and cursed the wind, which, fresh from the Atlantic, carried all the bitterness of salt air in midwinter.

We had been issued fur-lined caps. These things included earmuffs, which were attached to the cap. They effectively blotted out all sound when the flaps were down, so everyone had to put his ear flaps up. One lieutenant, a cheerful character liked by all, was immediately nicknamed "The Kangaroo" for the simple reason that he looked just like one as he bounded over the snow, his earflaps waving up and down.

About midmorning, I was called and ordered to report to the captain. I did so.

"Gallant, get ten men and go with the lieutenant. You are to

take this work detail back to the barracks. Colonel Fuller will instruct you personally, and the lieutenant will take you to his headquarters. The Army has complained about the barracks. . . . They say they are not policed well enough. You people will take care of that."

I saluted and left to round up the men. Soon we were aboard a truck. We arrived at the colonel's headquarters, a cleared place in the brush.

"Corporal Gallant reporting, sir, with a work detail for the barracks."

"Yes. Now the Army has raised hell because they think their barracks were not policed properly. They have sent me a message. I have told them we are busy, but that I am sending a detail to take care of any oversights. You stay there until they are satisfied. If you need to consult with an officer, the Navy doctor has set up a sick bay in one of the barracks."

"Yes, sir." I saluted and left.

We got back to the barracks. I learned there were five of these huge buildings. They were not clean enough, the colonel had said. I inspected them. It wasn't a matter of them not having been cleaned after the one-day and two-night use by the Marines, it was that they were old and filthy to begin with. We couldn't have gotten them in their present condition in less than a year. The urinals were yellow, the windows were dirty, the halls were dusty.

I assigned two men to a barrack and went to what I had been told was the NCO duty room for the area. There was no one there. The room contained a stove. I built a fire. Private Radek was with me. Since the working party was scattered over a large area, we had to have a central point of contact. This room was it. Either Radek or I would be in it, and we would know where everyone else was working.

We had seen no living human being other than our own group. The Army, we decided, didn't use this area. The fire was roaring in the pot-belly stove. We were getting warm for the first time in days. During late morning, an Army captain arrived. He came into our well-heated room, smiling.

"Good morning, sir," I said. We exchanged salutes at the door. The captain was of medium height, rosy-faced from the cold, and stout. He was in his late thirties or early forties.

"I'm Captain Homer Rhodes, Lieutenant. Do you have your men here?"

I was bundled in my overcoat and a trench coat. The trench coat had no mark of rank on it. I thought I had better tell him we weren't on the same level, militarily. I had always been told a corporal in the Marines was equal to a colonel in the Army.

"I'm not a lieutenant, sir. I'm a corporal. Yes, sir; we have a working party of ten men. They are cleaning the barracks now."

There was a more restrained air about him, now. He seemed a little more distant. I had a feeling he regretted shaking hands with me. But the only way he could take back the handshake was to shake hands again. So, he was stuck with it. His smile faded. He appeared puzzled. Evidently, the captain was ill at ease with higher ranks.

"Where is your superior officer? Uh, who assigned you to this duty?"

"Colonel Fuller, sir. He's out in the field."

"Who is in command here . . . here at the base?"

"I am, sir."

There was a moment of silence.

"But you are a corporal. Where is your commanding officer? Who issued you your orders?"

Radek was standing with us. The captain looked at him.

"This is Private Radek," I said. "Colonel Fuller gave me the orders verbally and personally. He is in the field. Out with the guns. I don't know exactly where they are set up. But he is with 'em."

The captain was very much put out by this time. "Now, Corporal, you don't understand me. Where is the commissioned officer in charge of your work here?"

"There isn't one, sir. The only commissioned officer here is the doctor. He's with the Navy. And he's in the sick bay . . . one of the barracks. The colonel said to consult with him, if we had any problems, and he is the nearest commissioned officer. But he

doesn't know about our detail. We didn't have to report to him."

"You are in charge?" The captain was confused.

"Yes, sir. This is an NCO detail. We don't use lieutenants for working parties. We have orders to clean up the barracks, and we are trying to do so."

"Well, Corporal"—his tone was firm, businesslike—"the mess hall that was used. It's not clean."

We hadn't been told to clean the mess hall. That was the job of the messmen and cooks who worked in it. But I didn't want to get things more complicated than they were. We were standing in six feet of red tape. At least, it seemed that way. I didn't want to get completely covered with technicalities or whatever we were being covered with.

"If you will show me where it is, sir . . . and what's wrong . . . we'll try to clean it."

He took me to a mess hall several blocks away. It was a huge room. "These tables," he said, "look here." We drew up to a table and bent over it. "See these crumbs in this crack here . . . between these boards."

I looked. Sure enough, there were a couple of crumbs. I noticed some cobwebs, too.

"These tables should have been taken apart and cleaned thoroughly. They won't pass inspection like they are."

"Taken apart?" I was completely snowed.

"Yes, Corporal." The captain lifted a board. The tables were built in such a way the boards forming the top lifted off. I had never seen any like them before. I lifted the board. It was just there . . . not bolted down, or anything.

"We don't have tables like this, sir."

"They are made so they can be taken apart and cleaned. You can see how."

I could. There were dozens of tables in the room.

"The room is not clean, either. The whole place needs a thorough going over. Stoves are greasy." He was warming to the subject.

I looked at the stoves. The grease had been there for a long time. I wondered if a hundred men could get the place clean.



I told the captain we would do everything we could. He left. He would be back, he said.

I inspected the barracks where the working parties were. They looked about the same. I ran into Private Radek in one of the old buildings.

"What are you doing in here? You are supposed to be back with the stove."

"Yeh . . . That captain of the Army came by. He said this head is still dirty. You take a look at it. He's nuts."

I looked at it. It had been used for years and not maintained. The urinals were still stained, just as they had always been. The working party had mopped the floor and had cleaned the basins.

"It's okay," I said. "If he wants white urinals, let him clean them himself. We haven't got anything that will take off that stain."

The working party went back to the woods that night and slept on the ground. This was air-raid training. Never show a light at night. Freeze to death. Don't let the enemy get you. Let Nature do it. The shelter half offered little protection. One blanket was not quite enough. It was a long, long night.

Next morning, our working party had to go back and clean the mess hall. They all hated me. I hated the project. We got to the mess hall. I showed them the tables. We solved the problem by turning a hose on everything in sight. It worked pretty well. Everything was wet. It looked clean. By the time we got through pushing the water out the back door, it was midafternoon. I went back to the NCO room.

"That captain was here," Radek grinned.

"Busy, busy, busy," I said with some weariness.

"He said nothin' is finished. The dump is still dirty." Radek opened the stove and spat in the fire.

"Where is he now, I wonder." I was getting tired of this jerk. "He should be running his company, if he has one. He must not."

"He's coming back. He's got a golden bar with him. Showin' him how to be a jackass." Radek had a canteen cup of coffee on the stove. I drank some of it.

"Boy, this stuff is awful" I blew on the cup rim.

"It's second make; same grounds we used yesterday."

I took another swig. "They do taste tender."

I warmed my feet. They were wet. I dreaded the captain's visit. He had no authority over me. Steam was coming up from my shoes. I shifted them to the little rim around the bottom of the stove.

"I'm going over to sick bay and brief the doctor. Maybe he'll inspect and okay this place."

"That's a good idea," Radek cried. He jumped up and looked out the window. "Let's call out the Navy." He grinned. "I hate to leave this stove."

"Damn the stove."

I found the doctor and told him the problem. "The captain is driving us nuts," I said. "The place is now cleaner than when we came."

"You show me. I'll take a look." The doctor was a young man, blond with light blue eyes. He was well-liked by the men, and had the respect of the regiment.

I took him around. He looked at the mess hall. It had dried out some. The Army captain found us there. I introduced the doctor to the captain. They shook hands.

The captain lifted a board off a table. "See these crumbs?"

There were still some crumbs. They had turned dark. They were down between the boards.

The doctor turned to me. "Corporal, have a man wipe those crumbs off that board."

"Yes, sir," I answered, and got Radek. He lifted the board and wiped off the crumbs.

The officers drifted off. The captain was in an animated state, still talking about the mess hall.

Radek and I went back to the stove. We waited. The doctor appeared.

"Don't worry about it; he's just excited." The doctor looked at the sky. "Only one case of pneumonia. If we'd left those windows closed, we'd have a sick bay full."

"Doctor, who relieves us? The colonel told us to check with you."

"Go back to the field," he said. "You can't rebuild this place."

We got transportation and went back to the woods. I reported to our captain and told him we had been relieved by the doctor. I also told him the Army wasn't happy. He said he would notify the colonel.

The next night we headed back to New River in our trucks. Later, I heard the Army was raising cain, and that there was to be an exchange of letters with Washington about the mess hall and barracks.

That was the last I ever heard. We never went back to Camp Pendleton and the crumbs we found there.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### In the Bogs of Verona

On January 18, 1942, in the dead of night, we arrived at Verona, North Carolina—a general store, a gasoline pump, and crossroads near New River and Jacksonville—and moved over a primitive track cut from the soil of a wilderness. Our FWDs penetrated into a dismal forest, rocking and plunging through massive holes in the road, and came to a thumping halt in the middle of nowhere.

By daylight, we witnessed a scene of basic living in Nature's bosom. The camp had not been built. Tents had been hastily erected by work details of other units, but they had no floors, were not trenched against rain, and there were not enough of them. The mess hall was a dirty, smoky tent attached to a field kitchen housed in an even more hazy atmosphere contained under a billowing arch of canvas. There was no heat. No water. No bathing facilities. No plumbing. No civilian transportation. No recreation. Tables of rough lumber served the dining area. We used our tin mess kits for meals, washing them ourselves after each meal in garbage cans of boiling water.

The present Camp Lejeune, which was to be located on the other side of Jacksonville—to the north of Verona—with its beauti-

ful brick barracks, fancy NCO Club and plush slop chute, paved streets, and nearness to town, had not been built. A tent city, called the main camp, had been constructed between Verona and Jacksonville, a village of only a handful of souls. It was to this established paradise, with its hot showers, we were to travel during the winter for baths.

Much of the land on which the base was located still had recently abandoned farm dwellings, tobacco barns of hewn logs, and other structures. The pace of the civilian communities, which were all mere wide places in the road, was slow. Life in them was peaceful, quiet, and dedicated to good works. Wilmington was the nearest town of any size. It was a cold town, indifferent to Marines and resembled Beaufort in attitudes toward "foreigners" wearing uniform.

The community of Jacksonville was like many rural towns before World War II. The way of life had not changed since the Civil War, or before. Chief recreational activity was church work and worship on the Sabbath. The rest of the week was spent on the farm. Saturday was the big day, at which time the living gathered to exchange gossip, buy corn meal and flour, and, in many instances, get pleasantly drunk.

The most sensational occurrence of the year was the arrival of a sideshow boasting a "For Men Only" tent. This demonstration of outside culture included a lecture on venereal disease, the causes of "getting up nights," and a discourse on "weaknesses" of various sorts experienced by men who had burned candles at both ends.

Entry to this exciting revelation of intimate knowledge and worldly activity was fifty cents. Gay blades gathered before a crude platform—no seats were provided—and stood on sawdust for the lecture. At curtain time, a "doctor," dressed in striped shirt, evening trousers, bow tie, and bowler, appeared. After quieting the audience, he was joined by a seminude peroxidized specimen who stood demurely at the edge of the footlights, a living sample of virtue and virginity to illustrate key points of the doctor's factual discourse.

This phase of the program was conducted on a high, urban

level complete with charts of both male and female reproductive systems in color. When finally completed, the talk left little to be desired as a first course in anatomy. Scholars could pay an extra fifty cents and attend a second course "in back." It was for this graduate class that all had come. On a lower platform in the back tent, the doctor and his original model were joined by three other girls in various states of degeneration, one of whom had a surgical scar to mark a Caesarean section of past glory. After spending an unnecessarily long time pacifying the crowd with threats that he would clear the house if there were trouble—and warning against cursing and lewd remarks—the doctor introduced the girls, who then disrobed.

Whether or not these medical lectures and living visual aids improved the situation in Jacksonville, I never learned. But they brightened the dull town for a weekend and must have cheered the natives who were young enough to desire higher education. I ran across the same show some ten years later in Tennessee. I was interested in the fact that the lecture had not changed one iota, but the girl with the surgical scar was no longer employed.

Our first job at Verona was to build the camp. Otherwise, we would freeze to death. The Red Cross sent in some sweaters knitted by kind women somewhere. They were of a loose knit, but of heavy yarn and were distributed without regard to size. I got a sweater that reached below my knees. It was fashioned for a giant, as I was almost six-feet two-inches tall. The garment had no sleeves. The color was an off-mustard. That is the only way it can be described. I have never seen a color like it before or since. It was rather sickening, but it was warm. The same day the sweaters came, the Marine Corps issued us long underwear, a concession it reluctantly made to the weather. I had never worn long underwear in my life, as it was not considered necessary in Florida, so I didn't know my size. I pulled a number out of thin air. It proved to be almost as generous a size as the sweater. But I didn't care. I was overcome with happiness at the idea of warmth, no matter how it was to be achieved.

I put on the long johns and they gave me an idea as to what

to do with the sweater. I put it on over the long johns. This was not exactly high fashion, but with dungarees over them, and with an overcoat and gloves, I was almost warm. That's the way I dressed throughout the winter—day and night, as I slept in my clothes, as did everyone else. We slept on canvas cots; the same kind we had used in boot camp. No mattress. The trouble with this in winter is that no matter how much cover you use—and we didn't have but one blanket each—cold winds penetrate the canvas upon which you are freezing. There were many mornings at Verona, where the temperature sometimes fell to eight below zero, when I would wake up with my blanket covered with snow that had blown in during the night. Sleeping in heavy clothing in winter is not a healthy practice. You perspire. This begins to cool you off. Soon you are freezing. There is no way out, either. If you sleep only in long johns and a long sweater, the icy air freezes you even more quickly. The military didn't know too much about cold-weather operations then. Not as much as they do now.

All the NCOs were assigned various details to build the camp. I had a working party in the woods. We cut down trees and sawed them into eight-foot lengths. My crew's production was about seventy logs a day. We liked the job, because we were away from camp and paced ourselves. Every once in a while a second lieutenant would come out and stand around for a while, then mark more trees for us to cut. It was an executive decision to decide which trees to chop down. Different officers had different ideas. Some would mark huge pines. We would cut them, then get the word back that they were too big. The next officer out would mark smaller trees. The logs were being used for walks and rails. Other crews along the road that connected the camp with civilization were cutting trees to lay across the width of this vital artery. Rain came and the log paving of the corduroy road sank into the mud under the weight of truck traffic. So, working parties were on this job most of the time.

We had wooden floors in the tents within two weeks, as the officers were told they could not have floors until the men did. And not long after this, men in the tents were allowed to chip in

and buy a pot-belly stove. I think the charge was two dollars for each of us. After a wait the stoves arrived and were installed. At taps they had to be put out—they burned wood. It was the task of the corporal of the guard to dump water in any stove he found still glowing when he made his fire check. This was a sad duty and drew many curses.

After we got settled, we took the FWDs and pulled down tobacco barns on the reservation. This lumber was used to construct mess halls, kitchens, and huts. An officers' mess was built in this way and a sign, VALLEY FORGE HAD NOTHING ON US, was placed above the door. Pulling down the tobacco barn was fun. The steel cable would be attached to the main beam and the FWDs would slowly wind in the wire, pulling down the barn as they did so.

We continued to have field maneuvers, night problems, and the dull task of setting up the battery in the field. The setting up of artillery is nothing but hard physical work. In addition to the aiming circle, I was assigned other work, too—as was Hirst. My poor mathematics finally resulted in my being placed with direct fire weapons. This came about in a rather mysterious way. I didn't expect it to happen just the way it did, though I had been waiting for it to happen in one way or another, for a long time.

On this particular occasion, the battery was firing 37-mm cannons mounted on the 155-mm howitzers. This achieves a savings in taxpayers' funds and it is a setup that can be used on a firing range too short for the bigger shells. We moved into a position being vacated by another battery. I set up the aiming circle. The captain gave me the figure to work with and The Kangaroo was urging all speed in setting up. He was excited because our colonel was in the forward observation post to watch the firing.

After following the methods of aiming circle operation I had learned, and after applying my own brand of mathematics at various points in the procedure where calculations were called for, I announced to the gunners what I had concluded was the figure they were to apply to their sights. They used the figure.



To the astonishment of everyone this caused the guns to be moved in a radically different direction, as compared with the aim of the preceding battery. We had seen where the guns before us had been aiming, but, now, our guns were many degrees to the left.

I was depressed by the whole thing. The Kangaroo was urging more and more speed of operation. The pressure of events was too much for us all, and the wheels of progress ran over us, especially me. I felt as if I had thrown a lever to a giant mill-wheel and it was bearing down upon me. I was powerless to stop it.

What if this is all wrong, I thought. Yet, there was nothing I could do. I did not have time to recheck the whole process; it would have held up the whole operation and the forward OP was already asking if we were ready to fire. I didn't think we were. But The Kangaroo assured communications we had never been more ready. This optimistic note was sent over the wires to the forward OP, where our captain and the higher brass dwelt.

A cannon was loaded. "Fire One!" And a one-pound shell from the mounted 37-mm sailed into the sky to fall I knew not where.

There was a long pause. Much too long.

"Something is wrong, Corporal Gallant," The Kangaroo suggested. "Did you lay the battery correctly?"

"I hope so, sir," I said without much hope.

We got the order to "Fire One" again. There was another extremely long wait.

"Our Heavenly Father," I whispered. "I hope they survived."

"Secure the battery and stand by," the message from the forward OP read.

Well, there was something wrong. It was just a matter of minutes until I knew the worst. I stood by the aiming circle. It had defeated me. Or I had defeated it.

In a few minutes, too few it seemed, a staff car arrived at our position. Out of it poured an endless stream of brass. It looked very much like an old Keystone Kop movie wherein the automobile had measureless capacity. I had never before seen so

much rank in one vehicle. None was carrying a noose and rope; I was not to be lynched on the spot.

Captain Drake and the colonel were in the lead. I stood at attention and saluted. Captain Drake smiled. The colonel, who had dark, bushy eyebrows and keen penetrating eyes, stood silent. The air was oppressive with authority.

"Corporal Gallant, the battery is 600 mils off target. There has been a grave error in laying the battery. Tell me, step by step, what you did."

I told him.

"The steps are correct. I don't see how such a miscalculation could have been made," Captain Drake said.

I knew the probable cause, but I wasn't certain enough to swear to it. I was relieved to learn the steps I had followed were correct. I had often wondered.

The Kangaroo, who was standing behind me said, "You just made a mistake, Corporal."

"Yes, sir," I agreed. I didn't think it necessary to tell him I had asked him to check my work, and he had done so. He didn't mention this, either. I don't blame him for not doing so. He would have been a complete fool, if he had.

An aiming circle divides a circle into 6400 mils. My work was off target 600 mils. This is a great and generous error.

We were ordered to pack up and go back to camp. It had been a miserable day. I had made the battery look terrible. Back at Verona, I learned from one of the enlisted men who had been at the forward OP that I had been dropping shells within a few feet of the observation post occupied by the colonel.

"They had another round fired to see if it was really so," he said.

"I guess it stirred them up some," I suggested.

"You bet. It was close. It looked like they were the target without a doubt. How did you know where they were?"

"I didn't. Just lucky, I guess." What if I had killed the whole bunch, I thought. I had had more luck than was apparent on the surface.

This is the way I became a specialist in direct fire weapons. I

was given a squad and an antiaircraft .50-caliber, air-cooled machine gun. At the same time, I was told to train my replacement. This was based on the obscure reasoning of the Marine Corps that I knew what I was doing in spite of the fact I had nearly blown the forward OP off the map. But this miscalculation and embarrassment was to save my life on Guadalcanal. It was one of those things that happens in life which looks bad at the time, but proves later to have been a key point—a mysterious change—in the course of one's life. It was one of the most important things to have happened to me in my life, for had it not occurred, I would not have survived the Battle of the Solomons.

My replacement at the aiming circle was a fine corporal from Georgia. He was well-liked by everyone. Quiet and hard-working, he should have been instrument corporal, instead of me, in the first place. Hirst was told to help in the training program, too. And as it turned out, he did most of the teaching. Corporal Ralph Gilbert already knew most of the fundamentals, and his work progressed rapidly and well.

I was ordered to set up the machine gun and its heavy tripod at the edge of camp in a marsh. When it rained, water was several inches deep at the spot. My squad consisted of five men and myself. On battery problems, we had to haul the machine gun, set it up in the field, and guard the skies until we packed up again and rode the FWDs back to Verona.

At Verona, our gun position was in the marsh. Each day we had to clean the machine gun, which was exposed to the weather, and try to fight its slow disintegration. Sperm oil did little to help. It is a thin oil, and no matter how much we rubbed and oiled with it, the parts of the gun lacked the bright, metallic shine of a weapon housed in a warehouse protected by heavy grease.

Among the members of my squad was a private named Joe Husk. He was a Chicago pickpocket. It was evident from the first he had not been born to the ermine. As I got to know him better, I came to understand some of the problems of the Chicago police department. He had a friend, Millard Frank, who was also from that area, and who lived in the same tent. This pair

was as lawless as any I have ever found. But for some reason, they gave me no trouble within the squad and carried out their work with vigor.

I learned of Joe's expertness in picking pockets by personal experience. He used me to keep in practice. During our training sessions with the machine gun, I had to give talks on the weapon's use and instructions concerning its functions and parts. During these talks, Joe would clean out my pockets. I could never find anything when I wanted it. Joe always could. He would get up and help me look for the item—a notebook, a pencil, a rag, a pack of cigarettes—and would always find it, but never in the pocket I remembered placing it—and many times in a pocket I had just searched.

After I learned of his abilities, he continued to pick my pockets. I got to the point where I would ask him for the item I needed, and he would just hand it to me. This gave the squad a certain feeling of fellowship. We were the only squad with a professional pickpocket, and we were proud of him. His friend, Private Millard Frank, was merely a thug. But he behaved himself. He was under the domination and influence of Joe. He stole, too, but not from pockets. His specialty was my tent. I'm sure he operated in other tents, also, but that was not my concern. When I missed something from my tent, I would visit Millard and ask him for the missing object. He would produce it and claim he had found it on the ground somewhere. We played this little game all during the days at Verona. I never lost anything permanently.

Joe was the only member of our group who could fly to Philadelphia for weekends. He did this as frequently as he could get 72-hour furloughs. He would dress in "blues" and venture forth, his straight black hair plastered with grease and his face as bright and shiny as the belt he wore.

"Joe," I asked him after several of these trips, "how do you travel by air to Philadelphia on \$21 a month?"

"I'll tell youse, if you will not tell others," he replied in his thick accent.

"I won't tell others," I said, "because it's none of their business.

But I like to know how members of my squad obtain so much cabbage." I suspected he was stealing it on the post, but I had heard no complaints. We had not had any shakedown inspections, either. In these, an inspection party appears and goes through everything you own. Such visits, which were always without warning, meant something of value had disappeared, usually money.

"I pick pockets," he said.

"Hell, I know that. Where?" I knew there was little money in the pockets about us.

"In Philadelphia."

"You fly up and pick pockets there?"

Joe grinned. "Yeh, an' I do pretty good. It's the uniform."

I was astonished. It had never occurred to me I had an interstate criminal on my hands.

"When my dough gets down to ticket money, I get a pass and take off. It don't take long to refuel. An' I visit my old lady."

I had heard about his "old lady." She was a stepmother of great beauty, according to Joe. He would often shock those who didn't know him by talking of home and expressing a desire to sleep with his mother. He would do this before explaining she was no blood kin. Then he would describe the woman in detail and declare his intentions and plans for the future. His father, he said, was a sailor, and was away for long periods. His thinking along this line was completely depraved. He hated his father, but praised his taste in women in a rather sickening way. He said his "old lady" was very young. He often wondered how his "old man" found her, and wished he had made the discovery first.

"Joe, you shouldn't do this," I said. "It has a criminal flavor and does not reflect credit on the uniform."

"Ah, it ain't criminal unless I get caught. An' they ain't goin' to catch me. I am in the service of my country."

"Yes, that's true."

"Them civilians are making the grade and are loaded."

I could not deny this was the case. "They will catch you one

of these days and fling you in the brig. And from there to this stockade and the disgrace of a military tribunal. In other words, you'll never get off bread and water."

"Ah, hell now," he declared with heat. "You don't understand. They ain't goin' to catch me. I'm careful. An' I keep in practice on you."

"That's true," I agreed. "I wondered why you kept it up." I began to feel a party to the scheme. "Why don't you lay off for a while?"

"We'll be shoving off before long. Soon as we get this dump built, we'll leave it. Ain't that the way?"

"Well, yes. That's the word."

"I don't have long to operate, anyway. There's no telling where we'll go. That's right?"

"Yes, you're right about that."

"So, I got to have some liberty and some fun before I get hauled off."

In a way he was right. I could see his point. He was not doing wrong, the way he looked at it, he was trying to have a good time while he could. He would be picking pockets even if there were no war. In fact, war was keeping his activities down to a bare minimum. Philadelphians were really saving money. He was not visiting them very frequently.

"You ought to make this your last trip. It's just a matter of time until you get caught."

"I'm careful. I don't take no chances. Anyway, I like to visit my mother."

"I understand your feeling for your mother," I said. "But you should not get carried away."

He looked at me with his coal black eyes. I could see I had made little progress with him.

"I'm your friend," I said. "I'll stand by you, if you will straighten up and fly right."

"I got to go, if I'm goin' to fly right. I got to get to Wilmington."

"Yes," I said, "it takes a while to make it."

"Here's your knife." He handed me my knife. It had been in my back pocket.

"Good luck," I said.

He left on his errand of crime. A small figure of a man who—in a way—resembled a hungry possum. He presented an appearance of labored cleanliness. He shone in the afternoon sun as he stepped gingerly over the ruts on his way to catch the shower run to town. He had bathed in his helmet so he would have more time to hitchhike to Wilmington. Joe never got caught; not while I knew him, anyway. He continued to make Northern visitations as often as he could. Without fail, he returned with a bundle. Life, to him, was good, and the peace of an easy conscience was upon him.

Those of us who were less endowed with criminal skills sulked in our tents, seldom leaving the woods except to ride to Tent City and bathe. We didn't have the money. Weather kept the roads in deep mud. Arrival on the pavement was uncertain. Offerings of Jacksonville were lean. It wasn't worth the messy trip and the struggle to get back.

After we had been at Verona for a few weeks, the officers provided a beer party for us in the mess hall. As far as I know, this was the only time such a thing ever happened. We were puzzled, but came for the beer, which was plentiful.

The night of the party was bitter cold and wet. The mess hall was packed, blue with smoke, and hot as Hades. Intoxication was soon the rule, rather than the exception. Indeed, the very purpose of all who attended was to get completely stoned. Many did. They became looped to the gills and sank to the floor. These dearly departed were borne to their sacks by a detail provided by the corporal of the guard. There were only a few fights. These were minor disturbances, limited in scope, brief in duration. Our hosts, the officers, served to dampen any urges to struggle. In deference to them, many who would have engaged in conflict smiled sweetly and gulped brew.

As the golden liquid began to run low, and visibility in the superheated mess hall narrowed to zero, guests staggered from wall to wall. Occasionally an empty beer can was hurled in the general direction of the door. Some of the devout sang. These

were songs of profanity rendered to such old tunes as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "The Old Rugged Cross." With the exhaustion of the beer supply, the party came to a resounding halt. Those who could walk headed for their tents through the blackness of night, dragging their comrades behind them.

The next morning, at 5 o'clock, we moved through the chill of predawn on a field problem. This was a gruff, confused band; a wretched collection of souls in torment, languishing in the trough of despond. Many were cold, but few were frozen. It was a state of mind and body no combat was ever to demand. A supreme test in many ways. After dark, on that day, we returned. There was no laughter in Verona that night. Only the snores of the faithful broke the stillness as the guard dumped water on glowing embers in pot-bellied stoves.

The reason for our camp at Verona was always a mystery. We never were positive as to why we went there and built the camp. As soon as the weather began to warm and the forest was filled with sweet, pine scent of spring, we got ready to move. The roads changed from mud to dust. Grains of sand and clay swirled constantly in the fresh breeze off the Atlantic Ocean. By then, we were ready to enjoy the informality of our crude clearing in the wood. It was with reluctance we filled the garbage pits and covered the latrines, carefully erecting a sign over each spot bearing the date of burial and contents.

By the end of May 1942 we had completed the move from Verona to Tent City, almost within sight of Jacksonville. This was civilization. We gloried in it. Soft life. Liberty.

Verona had toughened us. We had been hardened by the elements. The rugged life of Verona with its constant inconveniences, dirt and hardship, had made us ready for Guadalcanal. But we did not know this at the time. Even Washington did not know it. At that time there was no plan for us to land on the Solomons when we did, if ever. Nevertheless, we had been trained for primitive, make-do living. We had known isolation for months. We had learned the many little things—things not found in military textbooks, but learned in actual field living—that would make life a little more bearable in the jungles of the



tropics. We came to know the night. We could sense weather change and anticipate the rain. The discomforts of wet and cold were conquered by adjustment of minds and bodies. Self-reliance was developed to a great degree, and we had begun to work as a coordinated unit. All of us had benefited in many ways. No formal camp could have given us what Verona gave. No weekend encampment could have. Verona was our real training ground for war. It was the only real training ground we ever had. Our training continued at Tent City, but it was centered on weapons. Verona aimed its training on us, individually. It was an experience that meant a change within ourselves. A shaping of mind and body. Verona toughened us in the constant battle with the elements, which is one of the chief burdens of the battlefield. It gave us renewed confidence in our own abilities; it showed us we could take adversity, which is the true test of the Marine.

Just before 4-M-11 moved from Verona to Tent City, a notice was posted on the bulletin board near First Sergeant Graves' tent. This document announced formation of a "Special Weapons" unit. NCO ratings and enlisted men who wished to transfer to this new duty should inscribe their names in the space below, the terse paragraph stated. There was no description of what Special Weapons was, where it was, or anything else. Just that it was being born. The name caught my fancy. It was dramatic. Possibly someone had discovered a super-gun, or a death ray. I read and reread the paragraph several times.

After a winter at Verona, I was ready for a change—a drastic change. I thought about the antiaircraft machine gun in the nearby bog. I could see it in my mind's eye as I stood before the bulletin board. The heavy weapon had been slowly going to pot all winter. Nothing my squad could do satisfied the gun. The more we rubbed it, the worse its parts looked. They were now dull. We could not get them to shine. Second lieutenants were beginning to question me more and more closely at every inspection. Just the other day, a lieutenant and I had stood in shallow water and mud at the gun's side discussing the situation. I argued that the elements were more than the gun could

stand. Nothing we could do—and we had done plenty—would stay the insidious decay of the gun. The junior officer agreed our problem was a grave one. But, he said, we were not cleaning the gun with the proper materials. This was a safe argument for him to make. We had used what the Marine Corps had furnished us. Regulations were that we could use nothing else. So, the talk was fruitless. I was left holding the bag in the bog.

The notice on the bulletin board offered a neat solution to the problem. I would move away and leave the machine gun to dissolve in the bog. There was another consideration, too. Since I had become famous for nearly blowing the colonel from his forward observation post, I had a feeling he would not exactly push me upward as an artilleryman. I had no desire to nurse the ailing machine gun the rest of my life, and I had no alternative other than nurse a 155-mm howitzer. No one was needed on 155-mm howitzers. Thus, a dead end.

I took out my pencil and wrote my name in the space below the announcement. It was with no little regret that I did this. I liked Captain Drake very much, and Sergeant Graves, too. I had a host of friends in the battery. It was a jump into the unknown. But I didn't care. It might be a lot of fun. Anyway, there was no assurance I would get the transfer. Indicating the desire for one, and getting one were two different things.

The notice stayed up for several days. Names were added to the list. George Trenton put his on the line. He was a friend of mine from the Northeast. Before joining the Marines he had been a plasterer and "cornice man." After a few beers, he liked to tell of his work on the cornices of government buildings in Washington. He urged everyone to go to the nation's capital and inspect them. If anyone could find anything wrong with them, he would assert with trembling voice, he would buy them a beer.

"Have you ever done cornice work?" he would ask of any group gathered in his tent to sip beer. When he got no affirmative answer, he would launch into glowing accounts of the excitement and danger of the art.

"It's a thrill to get under a high ceiling and set them stones.

We put up some eagles one time. And we was so high, we had dropped a canvas off the back of the scaffold."

"Why the canvas?" one of the beer drinkers asked.

"So we couldn't see how far we were off the ground. If you can't see how high you are, it doesn't matter. Just a piece of canvas where you can't see down. Or anything. Doesn't have to be canvas. Makes you feel secure and safe."

"You just did this in Washington?" I asked him.

He grinned. His face, lined by the weather, was tracked by wrinkles. "Everywhere. Plastered back stage in New York. That was something. Them women talk worse than men. Hate each other. They knew we was up there, but they didn't care. They just don't give a damn and cuss all the time." He swigged his beer and grew serious for a moment. "You don't really know women until you've plastered back stage in New York."

Actually, Trenton was a heavy drinker, too. In his case, he was so happy even when sober, he was considered fit for field duty. He was a goodhearted fellow. A man who had done hard work all his life to earn a living with his hands. He liked people. As many drinkers do, he loved what the Methodists call "fellowship." He enjoyed a group. He was in his element at any gathering where whiskey flowed and there was the carefree exchange of stories and opinions through shouts of laughter and good-natured ribbing. Trenton was a talker, too. Much of his interest lay in barroom drama as he had viewed it. In these happy watering places, the world focused for him to a soft, pleasant place with a background of popular music and the clatter of glassware. The great problems of the moment were laid to rest under the gentle glow of spirituality so dear to those who frequent the night club and saloon.

I never knew why Trenton joined the Marines. He never said. But he did join and was a good Marine. Happy amid difficulties. Fearless. Ever alert for a drink.

A few days after the list disappeared from the bulletin board, Trenton and I, and most of the others who had signed it, were notified of transfer. The new unit was forming at Tent City, we finally learned. This being the case, we moved with 4-M-11

to that area, then left it there. Special Weapons was in the same general area of tents. So, we were still in contact with our old friends, though we saw them less and less often.

We found Special Weapons somewhat confused. This was normal with new outfits—and with some old ones. But there was nothing seriously wrong. The officers were good men. The major was said to be half-Japanese, and he did look a little Oriental. The word was that he could speak the language, but I never heard him do it. He was a thin, deeply tanned man with a small mustache with waxed tips flaring from his upper lip. He never smiled and was firm in word and gesture. He worried and was nervous, but retained an icy bearing in spite of this handicap. His junior officers were capable Marines. He depended on them.

I was given a 37-mm cannon. This little weapon, designed as an antitank gun, was found to be next to useless for the job by the British in Africa. It was too light for the heavy German tanks. But the Marine Corps was glad to get such a weapon. It fired three types of shells: armor piercing, high explosive, and canister. Canister was a black-nosed shell with a flat end. When fired, the projectile, which was packed with steel balls set in rosin, turned over and over, and the ends came off. The heat of firing melted the rosin, and the steel balls were sprayed about in the manner of a large sawed-off shotgun firing buckshot. Canister was priceless for cutting jungle growth and reducing anyone hiding in it.

My squad also had a truck mounted with an air-cooled .50-caliber machine gun. This weapon could be used against either ground troops or aircraft and was fired from the truck. The vehicle was used to pull the cannon and carry the squad, ammunition, and other supplies. Each member of the squad had an '03 rifle, hand grenades, bayonet, and trench knife. I carried a submachine gun. All in all, we had more weapons than we could fire at one time. Other squads in Special Weapons had half-tracks. These were armored vehicles with a 75-mm cannon mounted over the cab and served from the truck bed. They were more effective than we were, as far as tanks were concerned.

At Tent City, we spent our working day learning to shoot the 37-mm cannon. There was a good bit of work involved in this, as perfect teamwork was necessary to put the gun into action rapidly. We practiced this day after day, until we could go into action and fire in less than a half minute. Each member of the squad practiced sighting by tracking automobiles as they moved over the streets of Tent City. We practiced estimating the speed of the automobile and applying the necessary "lead" to the sight in order to hit the target. When we became pretty good at this, we began actual firing of the weapon at moving targets—cloth outlines mounted on small trucks that moved over rails and were remotely controlled. This was a good bit of fun, and we were soon able to destroy the target with the first few shots.

Trenton discovered truck drivers did not have to fall out for inspections, so he applied as a driver. He did this with much secrecy. But when he got the job, it was the subject of endless talk and teasing. For days, he was impossible to be around, because he would rub in the fact I had to stand countless inspections, while he lounged at the motor pool. Orders came down that all noncommissioned officers had to pass the Marine Corps drivers' license test—for, after all, one would not want to drive on a battlefield without a license—and I had to learn the art of "double-clutching" as I changed truck gears. There is a knack to this. The whole squad would ride in the truck as each of the NCOs learned the art. Our truck jumped and jerked around and around the field with everyone holding on and shouting advice. The Marine Corps method of teaching is to keep doing something until it is mastered. Rote is the answer to all education, as far as the Corps is concerned. Therefore, we drove many miles, changing gears every few yards, until "double-clutching" was mastered and we could do it without our vehicle bounding into the air. The climax of it all was to drive an MP around a couple of blocks, stopping at the right times, changing gears, and making the proper signals. If he survived the ride, he approved the application for a driver's license.

During these training days, we received our first jeep. Trenton drove to my tent in it, happy as a lark and content in the knowl-

edge there was plenty of beer in his tent. Several of us got in for a demonstration drive. The only jeep I had ever seen before this had been in newsreels and magazines. Trenton was as proud as a hen with one chick, and we took off in a cloud of dust, raced across the parade field and down a bank. Trenton had unbounded confidence in the vehicle and was anxious to show us what it could do. We churned at the bottom of the steep slope.

"Watch this," he cried, shifting gears and pressing down the accelerator.

We clutched the seat desperately, our knuckles white, hoping we could hold on as the jeep surged forward and upward.

"Great God," Faircloth, a private, first class, moaned.

"It'll climb anything," Trenton explained in a shout, turning to see our nods of agreement from the back seat.

"Watch where the hell you're goin'," Faircloth urged, as the jeep's wheels spun in the soft sand of the bank and its radiator pointed skyward.

"Never fear, mother," Trenton grinned, his face beet red. The engine whined, a steady spray of sand flowered from the back tires. We began to bounce as the tires lost traction, then bit into the earth again. "Watch 'er go." Trenton was lost to the world in his excitement.

I decided it was impossible to get out without being run over by the jeep, as it was swaying and bucking as it slid sideways on the slope.

"Don't you think this is a little steep?" I yelled above the laboring of the engine and the whine of the tires. "This damned thing might flip over."

"You watch. It's goin' to make it." Trenton was leaning forward; the engine was turning over at top speed. Sure enough, the little car was going upward. But it did slide sideways some, too.

We topped the bank and jolted to a halt.

Trenton grinned, his eyes glassy. "It'll do the same thing backward," he announced, jamming the gears into reverse.

We plunged down the bank, bouncing high in the air, barely holding on as we slid to a halt. We were too scared to move.

"You're nuts," Faircloth growled.

"Let's go get a beer." Trenton swept us with a glance, still smiling over his demonstration.

"Where?" I asked.

"At my little wigwam . . . it's on ice. I bought a bucket."

"The hell you say," Faircloth murmured. "You're just half-nuts. My gracious apologies . . . and you could have killed us all."

"The Corps reserves that right," Trenton replied, jerking the jeep into gear and swinging us around to head for the road.

We went to his tent and drank beer.

Trenton became a liaison corporal a few days later. He announced his new title with an air of gravity. "I have been swept off my feet by Lieutenant Rose," he said. "He has made me his liaison corporal, as of this date—the United States being in a state of war."

"And what is that?" I asked. "Do you iron his things?"

"No. He does his own things. I haul him in my little jeep. And I carry messages back and forth. I bring the word. And I carry the word."

"Did you get the word?"

"No, what is it?"

"We are on the verge of leaving this dump."

Trenton jumped in astonishment. "No?"

"Yes!"

"Have a can of beer." He reached under his sack and pulled a case into the middle of the floor. "This calls for spiritual consultation."

"We are packing tomorrow." I opened the beer and it foamed out.

"We have been packing for weeks." Trenton opened his beer.

"Yes. But that was gear. We are securing the guns and the truck is to be loaded, and then we are to be loaded."

"There is not enough beer here . . ."

"On the train . . . at a date very soon. There, courier, I have given you the word. Why don't you tell the Rose?"

Trenton grinned. "And ruin his day?"

"Yes."

"He knows. I could tell it. His eyes were glazed and he mentioned heavy officer club duty."

"You didn't suspect the reason?"

"It didn't dawn on me. I thought he was thinking of home. . . . So, we are finally leaving . . . going out to get the slopeheads . . . And I wonder where . . ."

"Pacific, I think." The beer was pretty good. I opened another can.

"Yep. Bound to be."

We had no way of knowing. But in our hearts, somehow, we knew. It was the Pacific. We knew, and we didn't know. We felt it. But we didn't care, either. It didn't matter to us where it was. We were ready to move. We were glad the time had come. It was a feeling of subdued excitement and anticipation. It would be fun. Dangerous; but it would be fun. We would push everything before us. Nothing could defeat us. We were Marines. Members of the Fleet Marine Force. And—well, nothing could be worse than Verona.



## CHAPTER NINE

### Unfolding the Unknown

Movement of troops is a majestic thing. It quickens the heart and moistens the eyes with tears. Pride and excitement mingle within the spirits of men, and they cheer those who bear arms to battle.

Marvelously complex plans, coordinated to mesh beginnings with events turning on tenuous threads of chance weeks and months in the future, guide every step, sort every meal, note every conveyance, provide every necessity, place every man. By such movement, planning and chance, men are lifted to the chosen battlefield, a precise dot on a map, a precise footage on a precise beach at a precise time of day and tide. In this measurement of land mass and sea and time and fluctuation of factors guided by blind probability, there are amassed an endless strand of thought patterns, written concepts and philosophies, orders and acts that have been obeyed by hundreds of thousands of men and women who make up the nation.

Men are launched to battle with a thunder of boots against the earth of the homeland that bore and nourished them. Brisk sounds ring out in the morning air. The cry of commands. The squeak of leather. The roar of motors. And against the backs of

men, pulling down on their shoulders, the straps of the combat pack cling.

These sights and sounds provide an undercurrent of emotion to fill the hearts of these men, who know this day, this time, is a turning point in their lives. This moment is a division in those lives as stark and real as a barbed-wire barrier, a massive wall of stone, a steel door locked and bolted against them. This instant marks a place in time when for each man time took on new meaning, and the brain, sensitive in its black tomb, took note and recorded on the throbbing, living cell, this moment.

There is no feeling, no atmosphere of emotion, quite like that of a troop movement against the enemy. This feeling is a stranger to the other great emotions of mankind. It sets apart in towering splendor, a rock in a vast sea tossed by a black storm of unknowns. This must have always been; this feeling, strange, eerie, sad. It must have been thus ever. It must have been the same on the misty meads of England as the knights gathered. Or among the Chinese and the Hun. It must have touched the Roman and the Greek and the Spartan of so long ago.

This passion of the mind and spirit, this great human experience, catches up men and lifts them outside themselves into a strange, unreal world. Such passion gives birth to hymns and great speeches, produces mighty thoughts and inspiring words carrying power to grasp the very souls of men. These words, often written by those who watch and wait, combine the suffering at the fireside of humble cottages of the land and the terror of battle's clash beneath artillery's brittle thunder.

For men of the troop movement, those of the units streaming away to some distant place, the act is as of a dream. It is an act containing a sweet sadness of which Shakespeare wrote, but did not fathom. Such lonely sadness mingled with pride and sorrow cannot be contained in cryptic symbols. For it is a deep, melancholy emptiness, an ache within the breast; a feeling of loss that cannot be grasped and held by the mind for examination. It is an emptiness, that death brings. A sense of departure felt in a house of sorrow. It is a cutting off of the past; a breaking of the joints of past and present and future to be separated and

laid out in dim compartments of memory, subdued and silenced under a mystery held by the future.

In the face of these things, there is laughter. There are little jokes and uncomfortable efforts to enact a part that is expected, when what the part requires is not fully known.

The bright eyes of youth glow beneath the helmet's rim. Bright eyes that dance with excitement and delight and pleasure. But behind them, behind these eyes, there is a feeling of strangeness, utter commitment, a leaving without a chance for a backward glance, or a final word, or a tender kiss. The knowledge of the small, precious things being set aside—pushed away by war—is disquieting. The memory of those kind human beings who have nourished them—have loved them and cared for them—and have bound their childhood wounds and kissed the tears from infant eyes, suddenly becomes sweet and precious.

But these human thoughts must be cast aside. Compassion must be crushed. Feeling must be frozen and stored away. Tenderness must die. It must be this way, for should it not be, the cross of horror they must bear would be weighted beyond endurance, and they would become mad.

So, there is laughter. Little jokes. Waves of the hand. Smiles. Shouts from the windows. And sometimes a band plays. Sometimes old men, sad-faced and bent, watch. Young girls, clad in tights, prance, sometimes. In this way the threads of a lifetime are severed. They are cut with forced smiles and loud voices that hide the emptiness and sorrow of the heart and of the soul. These threads, so delicately woven by countless events since childhood, are broken while Death looks on and youth dances on the grave, and their tattered ends, ragged with the cruelty of the moment, hang limp in the palsied hands of the old men who watch with sad, worn faces as the heavy wheels of war turn before them.

On June 12, 1942, we struggled into combat packs, mounted trucks and were hauled to railroad tracks in the bright, clear sun of a cloudless day. A long train of Pullman cars awaited us, steam drifting upward from hose couplings, and far down the track the great locomotive hissed and grunted, black smoke

pouring from its stack. We dismounted from our trucks and formed in ranks. The roll was called once again, and we filed in long lines to our Pullmans.

A movie camera recorded this loading of our bodies into the dim interiors of the cars. As we approached the glass eye and could hear the whir of the camera, a voice filled with laughter shouted for us to smile. "Don't look so solemn," it cried. "Let's have some smiles and waves of the hand." We smiled and waved, but our thoughts were far away.

Our troop movement was secret. There was no great crowd. No sweethearts clinging, no parents ill at ease and quiet, no tossing of flowers or presentations of cookies. There was a little knot of Marines: the truck drivers, the work details that had loaded the sea bags, a scattering of officers. The band stood nearby. It would play and pause for a while, and play again. It was a tonic for us, and we loved its music: the drums, the brass, and the clash of metal cymbals.

We found our seats. Trenton faced me, red-faced, excited, grinning. We watched out the big windows, absorbing the last small sights enacted before us, listening to the muted military marches produced for us by the band. The trucks that had brought us stood empty in a long line. The drivers clustered in a small group at the radiator of the lead vehicle, talking quietly and watching our train, waiting for us to move away. Then they would return to camp. But soon they would follow us.

Negro porters in their white jackets moved through our cars, their faces wreathed in smiles, exchanging wisecracks with the Marines, answering questions about food, denying knowledge as to where we were headed. Then there was the familiar jerk of the train, the clash of cars and couplings, the heavy squeaks of brake drums against metal and the prolonged hiss of steam that billowed before the window. And after a short backward movement, after drifting a few feet in the wrong direction, there was the powerful jerk of the great locomotive that threw us about in our green velvet seats, and we began to move slowly away from the little gathering that waved and watched from the trackside. The band struck up the *Marine Hymn*. We glued

our faces to the windows and drank in for the last time the sights we knew so well.

We had no idea exactly where we were going. No one would tell us. So we guessed. There was more talk of the West Coast than anywhere else, but there was enough counterspeculation to confuse the issue. Rather than west, our train headed south and we went through Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Atlanta, Georgia. Then we struck out for New Orleans, Louisiana, wandered through Houston, Texas, and by June 14, we were in San Antonio, Texas. So, I celebrated my twenty-second birthday on a troop train passing through San Antonio, and going I knew not where. In order to confuse possible spies, our train wandered widely and stopped only to change engines and crews. Our porters stayed with us, as did our diners and the waiters in them. We were not allowed to leave the train at any stop, or to mail letters from it. Agents of the FBI rode with us, and guarded the mailboxes when we halted for brief periods.

In many instances, our train stopped near houses, and women and children would form little clumps of observers. Marines would shout to them and talk from the doorways of the train. Most of the conversation consisted of trying to learn the name of the town, and what was going on up toward the engine. Many times women would bring baskets of food to the train and distribute cookies and fruit as long as their supplies lasted. Often it was very evident these kind souls could not afford to share such generous quantities of their foodstuffs, for they were poor people and dwelt in the modest frame homes a few yards from the tracks. Their sacrifice was not lost on the Marines, and the expressions of appreciation were sincere, loud and long. These generous people were not representatives of any organization. They were just Americans who appreciated the fact the young men on this long, mysterious troop train were far from home and were on their way to protect their land against an aggressor. They had conducted no fund drives. The food they distributed had been bought by the labors and sweat of their poorly paid men-folk, and the candy and cookies had been prepared by their own hands in the busy kitchens of their unpainted houses. The Red

Cross did not appear, possibly because of the secrecy of the movement. But toward the end of the journey, it did manage to get post cards to us. Since we could not mail them, we found them of little use.

Life inside the train soon settled into a routine of reading, card playing, watching out the windows and talking. The train moved day and night. Its infrequent, brief halts served as high points in the day, and its passage through a town of any size stirred deep interest and intense efforts to determine the name of the town. Most of the time there would be a clue—a sharp eye would spot a sign that gave the secret away—but quite often only detective work lasting far into the night would resolve the mystery of the name of “that big dump we went through about supptime.”

A great deal of time was spent getting meals. Though each car had its particular moment for service in the diner, the plans of military strategists did not always coincide with those of the chef working frantically in his cramped, tossing kitchen. Thus, meals were not always ready when they were supposed to be, and the pangs of hunger that were to become so familiar in the near future were reminders of man's difficulties where perfection is concerned. When once produced, the meals were good, but the quantity was never enough to satisfy the hearty appetites of these active young men. Besides the day-long problem of eating, there were the activities of shaving and bathing to consume time. Patience was the chief requirement in the men's lounge, for the two basins were inadequate to the demand made upon them, and the effort to stay clean was slowly defeated by the passage of days without showers. The wash basins served to slow creeping layers of coal dust and dirt, but they never had a chance to defeat this advance into the travelers' plague of uncleanness.

Trenton and I had tossed for bunks. I won the lower berth and he was housed in the upper, which had the disadvantage of no windows. So it fell to me to keep watch during the night and notify him when we dragged through dreary switchyards and crossings of a city. The warning bells of street crossings usually awakened me. After a few minutes' study of the passing

lights outside, I would kick the bottom of his berth, which was my ceiling, and jar him awake. He would slide down the curtains, land in the aisle, and we would go to the end of the car to stand in the open door to watch the passing scenery of warehouses, tenements, garbage dumps, industrial installations, boxcars on freight sidings and all the fascinating scenes of a big town's backyard. If the hour was late enough, we stood in our underwear. Otherwise, we wore trousers and waved at motorists halted by barriers and exchanged shouts with yardmen who moved along the drifting train checking brakes and couplings.

The train was serviced during the night or early morning hours. The water tanks were filled, food loaded, garbage hauled away and engines changed in the echoing vastness of outlying marshaling yards. These things were of broad interest to all of the Marines, and we listened and watched with great delight. As we entered the Midwest, the terrain, houses, and people were strange to us. The sights were fresh and new. We did not want to miss anything. We seldom did. We saw no newspapers or magazines, so during the long journey within our country we had to entertain ourselves as best we could in isolation from our fellowmen. We passed a cross section of men, women, and children as we slid past their homes, their fields and streets. We waved and they waved to us. Sometimes we passed a passenger train sidetracked for us, and we got to exchange bits of conversation with these civilian travelers.

The trip was not dull by any means. There was something to occupy us day and night. We enjoyed the change from hard work in the open. The lack of a formal schedule was a luxury. The physical rest was beneficial, and the opportunity to see so much of America was an education to all of us. The trip gave us a sense of the vastness of our country, its beauty many times was breathtaking, and we realized most American homes or towns were little different from our town. We gained a deep sense of purpose; inside ourselves we realized the great wealth of our land and how precious it was to us. We didn't discuss such things, but it was reflected in the eyes of Marines as they spent long hours watching the moving landscape rolling endlessly

by, and the laughter and fun that were created by sights along the way.

We penetrated the outskirts of San Francisco as twilight's glow colored rolling hills, lush and green, making everything seem new and fresh. As night fell, our porter came through the car pulling down shades. We were to enter this beautiful city behind closed shutters, a long, dusty train of cars apparently empty. The doors were closed and locked shut. We could no longer stand in the wind of the train to watch from the heaving steps between Pullmans. The lights were turned on. We took our seats, talking of what San Francisco might bring. Some thought we would stay here for a while, others argued we would leave immediately for battle. In any case, we were anxious to get off these tossing cars, leave the narrow dirtiness of their sticky seats and iron walls and walk the streets of a new, strange, glamorous city.

The train moved at reduced speed. Wheels clacked as rails joined to other tracks, shifting us in new directions through the yards. We ate supper in the diner and by the time we had finished, we were grinding to a slow, jerky halt, the smell of the sea filtering through our quarters to bring a fresh, fish odor of salt and sand and restless brine into the smoke-laden air to which we were accustomed.

We gathered our packs and swung them over our shoulders. Their weight pulled us backward as we picked up weapons and checked to see if we had forgotten equipment. Finally, the doors were opened. We filed from the cars to stand on a long, covered wharf, its ceiling arching far over our heads and the sound of a city tunneled to our ears from streets we could not see. The train had come right into the warehouse of the wharf. Towering above us was a rusty ship. A great vessel of the sea. Its huge ropes clutched massive iron posts set in the dock. Its gangplanks were extended to a broad pier of thick timbers. Solid-tired trucks of World War I days chugged up and down hauling supplies: foodstuff, crated military equipment, freight. Winches cast long lines from the ship's deck to lift trucks and jeeps upward in the glow of searchlights. Noise filled the night.



The breeze of the Pacific blew through the timbers carrying strange smells of the sea to us, exciting our imaginations, as the sea has always excited the imaginations of youth with its silent mysteries of far-off places.

We formed into columns on the broad deck of the wharf timbers and marched up the gangplank single file to have our names checked off a list as we reached the ship's deck. We twisted and turned along the deck, busy with loading and sweating sailors, and descended ladders into the bowels of the hulk. My squad and I found ourselves far aft and deep below the waterline in a compartment whose deck was broken by a massive hump. This, we were to learn, was the driveshaft of the vessel which turned the screws propelling us through the sea—a device considered a prime target for enemy submarine commanders. This was to be our home. However humble, it was as deep as we could go; our deck was level with the screws. Under them was the keel. And the keel was hanging in the sea. A notice on the doors of our compartment notified us they were watertight and would be closed in case of emergency. This thought did not comfort me. I decided to do something about my sleeping arrangements, if I could. I wondered about sleeping on deck. The compartment was stuffy. Unshaded bulbs cast bright light against cream-colored bulkheads studded with rivets, pipes, cable, and signs indicating direction. Stark iron bunks, three high, were bolted to deck and ceiling. Each of us possessed one, strapped packs to their bars, and turned to find showers for our first real bath in almost a week.

Our vessel was MS *John Ericsson*, a Norwegian product of shortly after the turn of the century, manned by the Merchant Marine. It had seen better days. To say it was almost worn out was to be charitable. But it floated. It had been repainted, and was clean. At that particular time, the United States was happy to get any ship that would operate. The *John Ericsson* was fruit of this situation. I never did decide for sure whether the *John Ericsson* was a freighter or a passenger ship, though I suspect it served as both in better days. But now, it was a converted troop carrier with every available space jammed with bunks.

We got liberty from the ship beginning at noon each day and lasting until midnight, when we had to report in. Only a few men were required each day for shore patrol, work detail, and fire patrol aboard ship, so the majority of the 11th Marine Regiment of the First Division was abroad on the town each day.

Trenton and I were under the smiles of good fortune, for we drew no details and were not assigned to shore patrol, and within minutes after high noon, we were speeding down the pier, heading for civilization and the nearest bar. The pier, which I believe was Number 48, emptied into Chinatown, the beautifully exotic section of San Francisco filled with wondrous sights, sounds, and smells, strange shops, beautiful Oriental girls, mysterious-looking ancient Chinese men with beards, quaint antique shops and the singsong of the dialects of the Far East. We discovered at once a place that served beer through a window as the customer stood on the sidewalk to drink his purchase. This was so novel to us, we could not resist the temptation to stand on a busy street with assorted Chinese and guzzle beer.

"Where to from here?" Trenton grinned. He was bursting with happiness. Here he was in town at last, unlimited quantities of drink close at hand, holding a beer in his fist and twelve hours to spend free as a bird.

"Let's find a bar with music and whiskey . . . and where the waiter can speak some English," I suggested. The old Chinese who had handed the beer through the window had spoken only Chinese in spite of the fact we had tried both English and pig Latin on him. Then we had been served after resorting to sign language, which he understood perfectly.

"J. C. Christ! Look!" Trenton cried excitedly.

I looked. "What? . . . I don't see anything."

"Walking . . . right over there. Don't you see her?" He was pointing, using his beer.

I followed the sign. A beautiful Chinese girl was striding along the street in a split skirt. The skirt was almost split off.

"Mighty pretty. You just don't see anything like that in Verona," I observed.

The girl disappeared in the throng. Trenton continued to stare.

"She's gone," I said. "Now, let's go."

We handed the bottles back to the old man. He smiled and nodded his head up and down. We smiled and nodded our heads, too. The sidewalk was crowded. We weaved in and out, passing Chinese of all ages and sizes. The trip was uphill. We soon learned all of San Francisco is mostly uphill; up steep hills. Never downhill. Uphill.

"Let's get a cab," I said.

We hailed one.

"To a good bar around here close," Trenton told the driver. He nodded, and we went three blocks.

"This one's okay." The driver pointed.

The entrance was interesting. It was dark inside. We got out of the cab, crossed the street and went in, felt for the bar, and sat down. We ordered bourbon and water. There were only a few people in the place. It was too quiet. We wanted fellowship. We drank up and left. We walked several blocks. A young man in his early thirties stopped us.

"What unit are you fellows in?" he asked in a pleasant voice filled with interest.

Trenton and I were taken by surprise. We had been told not to identify our unit.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Are you Canadian Air Force? We have seen several of you fellows in town, and my friends and I were talking about it just now. They thought you were Canadian Air Force, but I said the uniform didn't look right. But I don't know what the uniform is . . . that's what I was wondering . . . if you are Canadian Air Force men."

He was a nice fellow. Neatly dressed, as was everyone in San Francisco, we had decided.

"No, we are U. S. Marines . . . Leathernecks, you know," I said.

"Marines? You fellows are Marines?"

"Yes," Trenton said. "We're looking for a good bar—you know, with action."

"Well, what do you know? Marines." The man was overcome. "There was nothing in the paper about you fellows being here. And I have seen a number of these uniforms . . ."

"You know a good bar . . . with action?" Trenton persisted.

"It won't be in the paper, I don't guess," I said. "We are just sightseeing."

"Is there a big bunch here? There must be." The fellow was excited and proud to have found out who we were.

"We can't say, we . . ."

Trenton was grinning; his eyes determined. "You can be a big help to the war effort if you know a good bar with action . . . people . . . music . . . we haven't much time . . ."

"Yes, we would appreciate it, if you know a good place . . . a club, or bar, with life . . ." I said.

"Oh, yes. Look . . . go down to the corner, and turn right. Then, let's see . . . oh, about four blocks . . . maybe less. On the right . . . you can't miss it . . ."

"Thanks," Trenton cried, and moved away.

"Thanks," I said.

"Marines," he said, watching us as we walked away.

"What's the matter with these people? They haven't seen Marines?"

"No," I said. "Not in quantity."

"But he thought we were Canadian Air Force."

"He was just confused by the movies."

We followed directions. Sure enough, we couldn't miss it. And we didn't. It was a nice place, full of people. We found a seat at the bar. The bartender arrived.

"Two bourbons and water," Trenton said.

The bartender looked for a moment, hesitated, then left to mix up the goods.

"He thinks we are Canadians, too," Trenton murmured.

"Maybe Chinese," I said. "We have just come from Chinatown."

The bartender delivered the drinks. "You fellows . . . what service are you in?"

"Marines," we said. Several heads at the bar turned and looked at us with interest.

"Glad to have you boys here," the bartender said. "This is on the house."

"Well, now," Trenton said, a broad smile on his face. "We thank you kindly."

We finished the drinks and the bartender appeared with two more. "No charge," he said. "A gentleman down the bar bought 'em."

"Thank him for us," I said. "You folks are very kind."

Trenton began to talk with a man on his left. They were discussing Chinatown.

"Where is a good bar in Chinatown?" he asked.

"Why don't you have dinner at the Forbidden City," the new friend suggested. "It is one of the top night clubs in town . . . Chinese girls wait the tables . . . good music . . . good food . . . drinks, you know."

"Yes," Trenton beamed. "Yes . . . did you hear that, Hoppy?" he asked, leaning toward me.

"We'll have to go there. Anything forbidden is usually good," I agreed.

A man and two handsome women came in and sat down along the bar with us.

"What branch of the service are you in?" one of the women asked me. She was seated to my right.

"Marines," I said.

She told her companions. "They are Marines. I told you they were. I have seen them all afternoon." She turned to me. "There must be hundreds in town."

"I don't know," I said. "I heard there were others, but I haven't seen them."

"Where are you from?" she asked.

She is very pretty, I thought, but she must be twenty-eight, at least.

"Alabama . . . and Florida, near Daytona . . . within fifty miles, that is . . . Sanford."

"I thought you were a Southerner."

Trenton was very interested in my conversation. He was not listening to the man on his left. He was listening to me.

"This is Corporal Trenton," I said. "He designed the eagles on the Treasury Building in Washington before he offered himself for sacrifice," I said to the green eyes and pretty face on my right.

"Eagles?" she said.

"Yes," Trenton said. "On cornices there."

The bartender brought us two more drinks. "No charge fellows," he said.

"Here," Trenton said, offering a five-dollar bill. "We must pay for something."

"Not here," the bartender said.

"What is your name?" Trenton asked, overcome with the paradise he had found.

"Bill."

"Bill, my name is George Trenton, USMC, and this is Thomas G. Gallant, USMC . . . both corporals, but I will not be formal. We appreciate this beyond measure . . . if we can do anything for you . . . uh . . . I can mix drinks . . ."

"I'm just glad you stopped in here," Bill said, smiling at our group affectionately. "You guys are the talk of the town."

"Why?" I asked. "We haven't done anything."

"You don't know how glad San Francisco is to see you. We feel safe . . . I ain't kiddin' . . . We are glad to see you . . ."

"Bless you," Trenton murmured, his eyes bright with moisture. He took a drink.

"Who is the beautiful young lady with you?" I asked the girl on my right. "Is she your sister?"

"No," she replied. "That's Betty and I am Frances. We are roommates."

"The gentleman with you . . . is that your father?" I asked.

"He is a friend of mine," Frances said. "We are not related."

"Too bad," I said. "I could have sworn there was a strong family resemblance."

The man had gotten up to use the telephone. Betty moved over and sat next to Frances.

"Where do you live?" Trenton asked, leaning down the bar.

"Armour Terrace. It's an apartment hotel not far from here."

"You are roommates?"

"Yes," Betty said. "We work at the same place, too."

"Why don't you eat at the Forbidden City with us tonight?" Trenton suggested.

"Well . . ." Frances appeared to consider this brilliant thought.

"Reily is supposed to drop by," Betty told her.

"Why don't you call us about eight?"

"What is your number?" Trenton noticed Reily was returning.

Betty rattled off a long number. Reily sat down.

"What did you say?" Reily asked her.

"It wasn't important," she replied.

Trenton punched me. "Did you get that number?" he whispered.

"Hell, no," I answered. "It was too fast and too long."

Reily was standing. Betty was standing. Frances was getting up.

"Enjoyed talking with you," Frances said.

Reily was impatient and appeared out of sorts. "Come on," he grumped. Reily and friends left.

"The boat has been missed," Trenton moaned.

"To have requested another transmission would have been to have caused enemy action," I observed.

"Yes," he said. "Liberty is too precious to risk the brig."

"Yes, indeed . . . yes, indeed . . . and thank you," I said as the bartender set down two more.

"A gentleman down the bar," Bill noted.

"He is; and we thank him and would like to buy him a round."

"No," Bill smiled.

"Well," Trenton grinned. "These people are the finest . . . I have never seen anything like it."

"Not in the East, anyway," I agreed.

"To New River," Trenton cried, holding his glass aloft.

"And Jacksonville . . ." I agreed.

"Verona . . ."

"Wilmington . . ."

"And 4-M-11."

"And 4-M-11."

We sipped the bourbon and water. It was very good.

"Let's down and shove," Trenton said. "These people have been too nice. We'll go to another place and help them."

"Okay," I said. He was right. We had been there two hours and had not spent a cent.

We drank up.

"Bill, you are our friend," I said.

"And all these people," Trenton added with a sweep of his arm.

Bill grinned. His face creased into a thousand wrinkles. He shook our hands. A firm, friendly handshake.

"You fellows come back. Anytime. Try to make it tomorrow. We're goin' to be lookin' for you. An' that's no lie."

"We'll be back," Trenton assured him. "We like the spirit of this place."

"Good luck," Bill said.

"Same to you," we said from the door.

The Forbidden City was upstairs. The stairwell was not well lighted and we fumbled upward toward a glow that marked the second story. We got there and entered through a group of Chinese. We were early; the place was nearly empty, a sea of white tablecloths. A dance floor was in a well below with tables around it. We found a table along a balcony. We could look down on the dance floor.

A pretty Chinese waitress arrived.

"What uniform?" she asked in textbook English.

"Marines," we said.

"You serve tea here?" I asked.

"Oh, yes!"



"By the cup?"

"No," she giggled and her eyes closed with mirth.

"No?" Trenton inquired in mild surprise.

"In pots."

Trenton was astounded. "Pots?"

The waitress was still giggling. She raised the huge menu and hid behind it.

"You have her disconcerted," I told Trenton. "Let's not get the help worked up."

"You can't just get a cup of tea here?" he asked, paying no attention to my remark.

"It's in tiny, little pots. Two cups . . . a little more, maybe," she explained over the top of the menu. She was bowing slightly toward Trenton. Her form-fitting dress glittered. It was made of a glassy looking material of many colors.

"I was the one who brought up the tea. He doesn't want tea. He is trying to get a free education," I said to her.

She turned and bowed in my direction; standing semibowed. Or so it seemed behind the glitter.

"You want a pot of tea?"

How could I refuse? "Yes," I said. "A small pot of tea and a bourbon and water."

"You want tea, too?" she asked Trenton.

"And bourbon and water. I always drink my tea that way." She left and came back with another waitress.

"You Marines?" the new waitress asked with interest.

"Yes, indeed," Trenton smiled. "You Chinese?"

"Yes," she laughed. "American Chinese."

"I am an American Marine," Trenton grinned. "We may be related. Are you a native of San Francisco?"

"Oh, yes."

The manager arrived and introduced himself. He was a distinguished-looking Chinese.

"We are delighted to have you Marines here. If there is anything we can do to serve you, or make your visit more enjoyable, let me know."

"Thank you," I said. "You have lovely waitresses. We are de-

lighted with the service, and this beautiful place. I'm sure we will enjoy every minute of it."

"The orchestra plays soon. You will like the music."

"I'm sure we will."

"I must go," he said moving away. "But I will stop back at your table later."

"Thank you," I said as he left. "These are fine people here," I said to Trenton. "They love us."

"They do. Or maybe they don't want us to think they are Japanese."

"They don't look the same as Japanese, who are slopeheads and hiss," I reminded him.

The tea arrived in pots. The second waitress brought the bourbon and water.

"We have two waitresses," Trenton noted.

"They think we are rich."

"We are. Who else has ever gotten tanked for nothing in a strange city?"

"True."

The music began. It was a fine orchestra. People had been arriving. The place was beginning to fill up.

"Have you noticed these cornices?" Trenton asked through a cloud of cigarette smoke.

"Hell, no. Do they have any?"

"They could use a good cornice job."

I looked for cornices. The place was too dark. I couldn't make much out of them.

"Why don't you offer to plaster the place during the night?" I suggested.

He shook his head. "It would take longer than that. But it would be a fine place to work . . . Chinese atmosphere . . . rice . . . pots of tea . . . and . . ."

"Yes," I said.

Customers continued to arrive. Tables around us filled. There was constant movement up and down our aisle. The babble of conversation mingled with the music and tinkle of glassware. We felt relaxed surrounded by people enjoying themselves. There

was no silly comedian to break the spell. Just good music and dancing. Plenty to see.

We didn't converse. For long periods of time we just watched activity around us, absorbing as much of the laughter and luxury and gaiety as we could, enjoying the comfort, the tea and the bourbon. We had neglected to change our order, so our teapots were filled as they were emptied, as were our glasses. We ordered dinner and ate, half famished. Breakfast had been nothing much. We had skipped lunch. We were almost starved. We had forgotten how hungry we were. The food was delicious, sparkling with sauces and flavors that made our healthy appetites even greater than normal.

Trenton and I stayed as late as we could, then left to catch a cab to our ship. We hit the top of the gangplank at five of midnight and were checked in as "clean and sober," a designation given all who returned clothed and on their own feet.

We felt our way down through the ship and stumbled into the compartment. I found my bunk and fell in. It had been a wonderful day. San Francisco had taken us in; we had fallen in love with the town. We had a few more days of shore leave, and we spent them in Chinatown, visiting bars, walking the streets, exploring shops and talking with people of all walks of life. We didn't regret a minute of our stay. We lived as if we might not see such days again. We lived each moment to the fullest, savoring each second, each sight and sound, each drink and bite of food. It was good to be alive and young and free; life was sweet and fine and good. Our cup was running over; we drank of it and ordered a refill.

The *John Ericsson* drifted slowly from the dock and slipped from the harbor. Alcatraz fell away to our port side, a cluster of grim buildings covering a rock washed by terrific tidal currents. As we passed the prison, we could feel the power of the tide tugging at the ship and causing it to vibrate like an automobile moving over a gravel road. The old ship moved under the Golden Gate Bridge. We looked back toward Oakland and San Francisco.

"We'll see the rest of it when we come back," I said.

"Yep," Trenton replied. "We never did get to Oakland."

The ship began to roll as it hit the open Pacific. I watched the oily looking waves and gazed back toward the receding coastline.

"Maybe Verona wasn't so bad after all," I said. "It had a certain . . . well, it had . . ."

"Good American dirt," Trenton grinned and spat into the ocean.

"Plenty of that," I said.

The wind whipped up. It bore the wild freshness of a vast sea. It was cool; a clean, fresh breeze with a tang of fish and seaweed. In the distance a destroyer—one of our escorts—rose and fell, disappearing and reappearing in the waves, a sleek, deadly looking craft gliding snakelike and low in the water. Ahead, transports, their broad fantails making them look heavy and awkward, left wide swaths of creamy foam. I felt small and insignificant on a weak and delicate craft. The ocean surrounded us, stretching from sky to sky, touching the puffs of clouds in the far distance. Beneath our feet the steel deck vibrated as we sailed toward the western horizon.

Ahead, somewhere, the slopeheads hissed. We intended to give them something to hiss about. There was a saying about it: "Hiss not lest ye be hissed on with the same hiss."

Marines said it was a rough translation of an old Japanese war manual. At any rate, the First Marine Division intended to have the last hiss. We savored the thought, and waited, as the *John Ericsson* sloshed through the sea around us.

## BOOK TWO

# Blood on the Rising Sun

*For we are all, like swimmers in the sea,  
Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate,  
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.  
And whether it will heave us up to land,  
Or whether it will roll us out to sea . . .*

MATTHEW ARNOLD: *Sohrab and Rustum.*



## CHAPTER TEN

### The Docks of Wellington

We sailed from San Francisco directly to Wellington, New Zealand, and by July 8, 1942, we had crossed the equator on a trip that required nineteen days aboard the *John Ericsson*.

The news of our destination was not immediately released, but when it finally was revealed, it didn't do most of us much good.

"New Zealand?" a private groaned. "Where the hell is that?"

"What's the matter; you stupid, or something?" a voice in the little group clustered around Lieutenant Rose inquired.

I turned to Trenton. "I've heard of it, but just where is it?" My geography had not included a very intense consideration of the Pacific area. Europe was given the full treatment in schools I had attended, but the Pacific was passed over. It was as if there were nothing between the American west coast and Japan, except, of course, Pearl Harbor, which had been located by everyone on December 7.

"It's out here somewhere," Trenton said helpfully. "I hope we can find it."

"Now men," Lieutenant Rose said in a voice of command. "New Zealand is near Australia. Uh, down under."

"Under what, sir?" Bellflower, a private in my squad asked.

Such a question was to be expected of him. He had only just two nights earlier engaged several Marines, natives of New York City's East Side, in an all-night argument concerning whether or not the sun moved around the earth.

It had been Bellflower's contention that it did. He had watched the sun move all his life, he had said. It was an observable and demonstrable fact. He could see it move. Just look at it at daybreak, and watch it rise. Look to the west at sunset. Watch the sun set.

I had been rendered speechless to find such beliefs currently held and sincerely defended—and especially by a member of my squad. It had never occurred to me he thought the earth stood still and the sun moved around it.

The hours of argument between Bellflower and his Northern friends only served to sharpen tempers of those who struggled in this intellectual conflict. Bellflower could not be changed. Indeed, Scripture was on his side, and he quoted the Good Book to the effect that a prophet had ordered the sun to stand still, and it had. If it didn't move, how could it be ordered to stand still? he asked. The Bible said so. Bellflower quoted the Good Book to refute science. As far as science was concerned, it lost. There was no science strong enough to move Bellflower, much less to spin the earth. So it was. And the argument closed on a bitter note, with an exchange of profanity and Bible verses between the former residents of the East Side of New York and Bellflower.

I had tried to reason with Bellflower the next day, hoping sleep had awakened him, so to speak. It had not. Patient probing into his beliefs found him so bound by literal interpretation of the Bible he could not be loosed without taking from him his religion. I had no intention of trying to do that. It was better for him to believe the sun moved around the earth. After all, what difference did it really make to him? Why cut from beneath his feet the soild rock of faith upon which they rested?

"You may be right and they may be wrong," I finally said to Bellflower to comfort him.

"I ain't wrong," he said.



"You have a right to believe what you want to, as long as it doesn't mess up the squad," I said.

"The Good Book says it, and it's right."

"Amen, Bellflower," I said.

In view of these facts, I did not want Bellflower thrown in the brig for arguing with an officer, so when he asked his question of Lieutenant Rose, I interrupted before the officer could get himself and Bellflower in trouble.

"Private Bellflower," I said, "drop by my sack and I will explain it to you."

"Yes," Lieutenant Rose cried, "you NCOs discuss all this geography and stuff with your men and try to brief yourselves on this place. They speak English . . . and . . . uh . . . men, they have beer . . . very good beer, I'm told."

This statement was greeted by a loud cheer and a murmur of "Amen" from the devout, one of whom was, of course, Bellflower, who delighted in beer, though it tended to put him into a deep sleep. In fact, Bellflower slept much more than he normally should. But I assumed he was more lazy than most, and thought nothing much of it at the time.

"What happens in New Zealand?" Trenton shouted over the outcry.

"We stay there for a while. Maneuver some . . . train . . . do that for a while."

"Well . . ."

"I can't say any more, men. This is all you can get."

"Hubba-hubba," Trenton said.

Lieutenant Rose disappeared in the crowd.

"Beer," Trenton said.

"They are civilized," I said.

"Where's this 'down under'?" Bellflower breathed in my ear.

"Look, Bellflower, damnit. It's simple. It's a figure of speech. We are going down to see these people and they will be under us . . . under our protection, or something like that . . . it's in the Good Book."

Bellflower looked at me with understanding lighting his eyes. "I thought he meant we were going under something."

"Hell, no. It's solid, you know. Solid earth. We can't get under it."

Bellflower smiled. He nodded his head. "That's right."

He ambled off.

"What a squad," I said. "They're all nuts."

"And you are the nut who's cracked," Trenton laughed.

"I will be by the time I get Bellflower back home. I didn't know they grew them that way any more."

"He'll make it. He's so calm, he sleeps twenty hours of the day."

"You're right about that. He dopes off."

"He knows the war will upset his rest, so he's storing up," Trenton suggested.

"That's as good an answer as any, but I think there is something wrong with a guy who sleeps constantly. He ain't ever awake."

"You mean fully awake."

"Well, he's never been *fully* awake; he was born that way."

We had walked forward and sat down. This was our place. There had been many hours of discussion about this spot, which we had finally located with a scientific cunning known only to the noncommissioned military mind.

Our group—my squad and Trenton, who, as liaison corporal, could stay with any of the squads in the company, so he had chosen mine—debated the question.

We knew an enemy submarine commander would want to hit the ship as near amidships as he could, because that was where the engine room was located. To do this, he would aim a little forward of amidships. Therefore, the torpedo would strike aft of amidships, as we didn't think he could hit the bull's-eye dead center.

Since it was our belief the enemy sub commander would miss the target, we chose his aiming point—forward of amidships—and sat on it. We knew he would not aim at the bow. He would try to hit the ship dead center, and most likely would hit it toward the stern.

Needless to say, this theory was never tested by us. But we

used it as if it had been tested throughout all time. When we were on deck, we were nearly always located a little forward of amidships.

The *John Ericsson*, true to the other equipment we had, stumbled through the sea and gave every indication she would not make land. On one occasion, her engines gave out entirely. We came to a lumbering halt in the middle of the Pacific, a sitting duck for subs. Our convoy dwindled away over the horizon. We were alone. It was a very deserted feeling.

"Is it sinking?" Pfc Harry Gilberts inquired. He was stretched out on deck, his head cushioned by a cork life belt.

"Naw, just stopped," Bellflower answered. He was half asleep against a bulkhead. He yawned.

Trenton, who had been to the ship's store to buy canned lemon drops, canned peanuts, and some cigarettes, appeared carrying his purchases. "That line was awful. It wound all over the ship . . . I've been there all morning."

"You always say that on your day. You are the liaison corporal; you should show your commission and barge on through." He sat down and handed me a can of lemon drops. We had been living on peanuts and lemon drops because of the ship's food. It was genuine slop, and we could seldom eat it. For breakfast we had been served pork and beans, coffee, rancid butter and white bread. Lunch had been soup and tea. Dinner the night before had been cabbage, ham, hardtack, tea, and potatoes. None of it had been fit to eat. The tea was weak. Lunch the day before had been one slice of bread, a can of sardines without an opener and a cup of coffee. The meals weren't worth the struggle to get them, though we usually went to see what they had.

"What's the word about our halt on the high seas?" I asked Trenton, who was pretty good at getting rumors as soon as they were born.

"Something wrong with the driveshaft, or something like that. The poop is that a German agent tried to mess it up, but the FBI was on to him and nabbed him down in the hole."

"You don't believe that, do you?" Gilberts asked in a voice filled with doubt.

"It's not a matter of belief . . . it's scuttlebutt."

"They must not have nabbed him soon enough," I said. "We are now a floating target for the German and Japanese Navies . . . and also the Italian Navy, too, if there is one."

Gilberts digested this. He was a carelessly put together specimen; long, thin, and disorganized-looking. He had very pale and scraggly eyebrows. "I'm not worried about the Japs," he assured us. "They can't see good. I ask you, have you ever seen one without glasses?"

"No." It was true. I had never seen a picture of one without glasses. I had never seen a living slopehead, but I had seen many pictures of them. They all wore thick, horn-rimmed glasses.

"I haven't, either. They are squint-eyed and buck-toothed . . . and bow-legged . . . and . . ."

"Their teeth have nothin' to do with this situation, Gilberts," Trenton interrupted.

"They will, if they put the bite on us out here," I said.

"Our little fantail is hanging out bare," Gilberts agreed.

Trenton offered an open can of peanuts. I took some and passed them to Gilberts. I gave Trenton the lemon drops. "Reckon they will get the engine started?" I asked. "What'll they do if they don't? Maybe they will tow us back . . . now, wouldn't that be embarrassing?"

"Ain't it hell?" Gilberts grumped. "Just like the damned Navy . . . give us a ship that can't make it to first base. I'd just as soon of walked." He popped some peanuts into his mouth.

"Don't blame the Navy," Trenton said. "It's the Merchant Marine. They are running this scow. That's why we are starving . . . livin' off canned peanuts and lemon drops . . . I always hated lemon drops . . . they make me sick. Anyway, that's why we are out of gas and adrift on this cesspool," Trenton said. The lack of beer was twisting his outlook.

We chewed lemon drops and peanuts.

"That's right, Gilberts. It was the good old Navy you saw go over the horizon . . . their engines are running fine," I said.

There was not a sign of life as far as the eye could see. We floated on a millpond of an ocean.

"When the torpedo hits, do you think it would help if you jumped as high as you could just as it went off?" Gilberts asked. "Then you would be off the deck when it buckled."

"Or when it disappeared," I said.

Trenton, sensing the opening of a philosophical exchange, shifted into a more comfortable position, restacking some cork life jackets upon which he was seated. "How high can you jump?" he asked.

"Well . . . oh, four or five feet, I guess. I don't know for sure."

"Straight up, flat-footed?" Trenton cried in astonishment. "Why, I'll be damned if that's so."

"Well, I was just guessing. I haven't jumped much lately."

I stood up. It was going to be too much for me. "That's not the question, anyway. Will it do any good? That's the question . . . I'm going and look over the fantail . . . I'll be back later." I left. I had to check the bulletin board in our compartment, anyway. These deep discussions of theory went on all the time. Some of the subjects interested me, and I participated. But this one, well, I didn't see that it would get anywhere. I knew by the time I returned it would have strayed into other fields. Maybe the new subject would be more interesting.

The *John Ericsson* could have been worse, but we were never able to determine in what way. The failure of the ship's engines on the high seas, which left us a helpless offering to the nearest submarine of the enemy, was an incident edged with danger. We were well aware our convoy escort was exceedingly light. But light as it was, it was a comfort. But the convoy had left us. It seemed impossible, when one considered the number of Orientals on the West Coast and the wide impression our visit had made in the area, an enemy agent had not seen us leave and marked our weakness as well as the fact that here was an expeditionary force en route to battle.

So, when the engines failed, many of us felt the terminal hour had arrived. I considered it a happy fact I could swim. At

the same time, I did not believe I could swim halfway across the Pacific. This feeling that it was only a matter of time until we were torpedoed, plus the rumor of alien hands tampering with the driveshaft, brought the conclusion we had been marked for burial at sea.

The two hours required to get us moving again were hours of tension and suppressed anxiety. We did not crouch in fear. But there was a gnawing uneasiness similar to the one felt at a dentist's office of the time—a day before much attention was given to the pain of drills grinding through sensitive teeth.

It is impossible to hide a large ship on a smooth sea reflecting bright sunshine into a mirror-clear blue sky. We stood out like an elephant in a fish pond. We knew it and felt naked and somewhat ashamed. We were embarrassed, in a way; here we were fierce Marines who had sailed off to slay the enemy, but now we were broken down, alone, hungry, thirsty, hot, bored, sober.

Our joy when the engines began to throb once more cannot adequately be described. We almost wanted to go below and pat them affectionately. Cheers rang out as the bow again attacked the sea and we laid down our foamy path in the blue-green water. Tension eased at once. Bets were taken as to how long it would take us to catch up with the convoy, which, we knew, was moving at reduced speed in the hope we would return. Catch up we did. The next morning we were among our friends, zigzagging cheerfully as though we had never gotten out of step in the heavy war dance of ships in hostile waters.

The *John Ericsson* bristled with little irritations for the estimated three thousand of us aboard. We were crowded. That was more or less expected. We didn't mind it much. But the sleeping compartments were something else. We did mind them. Our particular compartment at the very bottom of the vessel, under twenty or more feet of water, and at the stern, was packed with men. Due to poor ventilation at this depth, the odor of sweat, vomit, and dirty feet was overpowering. Someone figured there were only thirty-two cubic feet per Marine in the place. Some of the feet exposed to the fetid air of the compartment could have wilted a rose bush at ten times that allowance.

Though the air cleared somewhat during daylight hours, it took very little time for it to become heavy and stale at night, making sleep impossible for me, and many others.

To avoid the stench, and because we felt it safer above than below the waterline, many Marines stayed on deck most of the day and slept there at night. Here the air was sweet and fresh and clean. There was activity to help pass the dull days of travel. This sort of life required one to place his blanket at a selected spot and guard that spot constantly. To leave it, meant someone else would take over. It was the custom for squads to stick pretty close together in this matter, so there was always someone in charge of the reserved space. In this way, supply runs were made to the ship's store without danger of real estate seizure. Such property owners were constantly harassed. All during the day the order for "sweepers" to "man your brooms" and "sweep all decks fore and aft" was chanted over the loud-speaker. This made deck dwellers have to pick up all their gear as brooms swept, and, sometimes, as sea water poured from hose in the deck cleaning process.

Rain was a factor, too. Frequent rain squalls drenched the decks. Rain can be seen miles away at sea. It occurs in patches, unless there is a general foul weather condition or heavy weather, and can be anticipated. Metal overhangs, overhanging hatch covers or vents or under stacks, life rafts, and lifeboats made good shelter on deck. But such covering was rare. Most Marines became accustomed to getting wet and thought nothing of it. At night, you just rolled up in a single blanket and went to sleep on the steel deck with a life jacket as a pillow.

After dark, there could be no smoking on deck, which was the most inconvenient part of deck living. It was necessary to go through blackout curtains and into the head to smoke. Afterward, it was a job to relocate your blanket in the darkness. In this effort to return, you had to be careful not to step on sleeping Marines, or stumble over deck equipment in the gloom. Progress was slow and uncertain. But there were compensations. The sky was new on the other side of the equator. It seemed all the glittering diamonds of heaven were larger than back in the

States, and closer to earth. Pure atmosphere was the prime reason for this difference. But the vast sweep of the universe, unblocked by trees or mountains or buildings, made the sky a part of the earth, a glistening black velvet blanket tucked under the edges of the sea, glowing with great stars by the thousands whose clear, cold light beckoned us from millions of light years of distance. And great moons of breathtaking beauty visited the nights and swept across the twinkling vault, first pale orange, or cheese yellow, then bedecked in delicate wisps of clouds, and fog frigid white, gleaming in reflected glory of a sun that now shone on our homeland. These were nights of peace and contemplation, of intimate contact with the great unknown forces of our universe; vast and mighty forces that made the petty quarrels of men and nations primitive and dirty by comparison. These were nights of separateness that monks must know; nights that hermits must relish as they gaze from their isolated caves, speechless of tongue, communing with the soul in the language of the soul through the voice of minds uncluttered by earthly things, and swept through eons of time by thoughts unrestrained by any barrier of time, or of distance. Nights that brought a soothing balm to us in our restlessness; instilled in us a sense of purpose and brought to us, each in his own mind, secretly, a depth of humility that we do not often allow to be plumbed, for humility is not a shield against a world such as ours, and we must carry a shield, else we would scream in agony of heart. But on these nights in the early months of World War II, we had not yet felt the harshness of battle. The tender emotions of our youth had not been cut and torn against stark realities of life's anguish and the clammy, ragged, dirt-filled fingernails of Death. We could lower our shields for the last time to bare our youthful idealism and knowledge of the rightness of things to ourselves and find these idealistic mottoes and thoughts and feelings good and true and everlasting.

We stretched on our backs, wrapped in our single green blankets, and explored the heavens with our eyes, wondering about the mystery of it, and about the even greater mystery of ourselves. For we ourselves were the greatest mystery of all.



So recently children; just yesterday, just a moment ago in time, we had been children, playing at our schools, learning Longfellow and the Preamble of the Constitution. Only a little while ago, we had known the keen excitement of harmless games of the playing fields of high schools and colleges, the thrill of dating a pretty girl, the pride of a suit, an automobile. Just yesterday, these things.

On the dark nights aboard the *John Ericsson*, moving through the great Pacific, whose power, vast emptiness, and frightening sweep is little understood by most men, we thought of fundamental things—not as committees think of fundamental things, but as individual human beings think of fundamental, elemental matters in the quietness of self. At this age, we were not afraid to do this. So we wondered, within our minds and secretly, how it had come to pass that it was we who were here on this strange journey. We didn't even know exactly where on the globe we were, and had not known for days. But this did not occupy us nearly as much as the odd, the vague, the undefinable feeling of mystery as to how "I" came to be here at this time, this moment, on this ship, in this ocean sea. It was an unsettling thing, this feeling. These thoughts drew before us the knowledge most of us have—the knowledge that we are neither masters of our fate nor captains of our souls—and it crystalized this ordinary, shy feeling into solid comprehension and elevated it to a position of such prominence it became a bold unelusive thing. It became a fact that existed, rather than a feeling that was suspected. And none of us could explain to himself on these nights of contemplation how it had all come to pass. Though we could pick up the thread and trace the design, we could not stand back and view these findings for they all seemed based upon chance, but a chance that followed a plan; a plan whose design ended at the moment before us. We could not explain how it was we were here, or how it was we were being carried onward with each dip and toss of the bow. For the first time many of us faced the fact we were caught, enmeshed, in a great, complex tangle of events, and were helpless before it.

Such feeling of detachment from control of one's own life

is rare, it seems to me, and I was struck by it. Such a search for meaning occupied my mind on several occasions in the blackness of the ship as I lay on deck gazing at the stars. Later, I discussed this feeling with others, and I found they, too, had felt it. It is very difficult to convey it, to describe the feeling of mind embodied in such unconscious probing of circumstance—for these thoughts appeared out of nowhere; they were not motivated by any conscious effort. They popped out and walked with us in the night. Then they passed on. They did not haunt us; but they impressed us, and departed. Of course, we never did find any meaning to any of it. We didn't search diligently; we just wondered about it. As far as that goes, I never have found any meaning. I still wonder about it.

The North Island of New Zealand appeared out of the sea early one morning. Suddenly, it was a landfall on the horizon, and we watched it with hungry eyes. As we lined the rails and strained our vision to make out details too far distant to be distinguishable, a plane flew in wide circles around us, inspecting the *John Ericsson* to identify her, then turned and headed back for land. We sloshed along. The mountains grew larger and details of the coast began to grow on the horizon. The *John Ericsson* slowed to a crawl. A small boat approached, ragtail, chugging noisily, puffing rings of gray smoke, as it bobbed on the mild waves. It rattled up to a ladder that had been lowered over the side. The pilot, a scarf wrapped around his neck and a wool cap bending his ears outward, reached our deck and headed for the bridge, a pipe in his mouth, his eyes watery, and his nose large and red. The little craft upon which he had arrived backed away with ragged dignity, waves slapping her and throwing spray over her narrow deck. She scurried off, rope bumpers dragging like tassels in the water.

We moved toward shore and nosed carefully into a narrow channel, feeling our way up a tight harbor entrance. As we moved, barely making headway, we gazed upward at a towering mountain, cloud capped and massive. Ruggedly beautiful, this height was lush with green pasture, dominant and massively

solid. On the mid-slopes, we thought we saw great splotches of snow. As we watched, commenting on the snow and the fact we were in a land where winter was in July, the patches drifted, moving ever so slightly, sometimes downslope only to turn and move upward again.

"That ain't snow," Gilberts commented. "It's sheep, or goats, or something like that, eatin' grass . . . Watch, now, that bunch there . . . see? . . . it's movin' up . . . snow don't slide uphill . . . see?"

Sure enough, the white swath was moving upward.

"Sheep . . . mutton chops. That's what that smell was when we got in close. Mutton chops cookin'," Trenton observed.

So these were great herds of sheep, blankets of white wool by the hundreds, moving over crisp grass, grazing the thick mountain pasture above us. We watched intently, trying to make out a shepherd, but could not.

Everyone was on deck, the rails were crowded, vantage points were occupied everywhere. This was the first foreign land most of us had seen. We watched with excitement and dedicated attention, anxious to dock and leave our rusty prison.

The loudspeakers crackled into life. The metallic voice, after a period of hesitant static, informed us we were about to pass a ship on the starboard side, and we were to salute its flag. We looked ahead. There it was. A large freighter. Its decks populated by sailors, and as we drew near, whistles blew and they came to attention. We followed suit. In this way, we passed. There was a feeling of high honor on this occasion; a feeling of pride in our country. The courtesy of this exchange of salutes was a moving thing. It spurred our pride in our flag, snapping in the breeze far above us.

Our pilot, his pipe clamped tightly in his mouth as he moved from one side of the bridge to the other to lean far out and call orders back to our helmsman, maneuvered us to the dock. As we drifted to the pier, a New Zealand military band struck up the *Marine Hymn* as a welcome, and the familiar music rolled over our ship. Lines made us fast to piling and the gangplank slid from the *John Ericsson*, connecting us with Wellington, the

capital of New Zealand, and solid earth, which we had almost despaired of ever seeing again. Packs of cigarettes rained down upon the handful of New Zealand soldiers and dock workers on the pier, and they scrambled to gather this valuable exchange. American cigarettes were more precious than gold, it appeared, and with them much business was accomplished. Since they cost us only a nickel a pack, or fifty cents a carton, we held a favorable balance of trade.

We were ordered to our compartments. Down we went, expecting to load up and disembark, but Lieutenant Rose had other news. He stood among us, one foot propped on the hump made by the driveshaft that had so faithfully served us.

"All right, knock it off," he began in the traditional style of Marine oratory.

Silence became immediate and the compartment was filled only with the mysterious sounds of a living ship, whirrs, taps, gurgles, and sloshes that can never be identified as to source or destination. We stood in a rough circle, noncommissioned officers in the innermost ring, Pfc's next, and privates on the fringes of the band.

"There have been some changes of plan," Lieutenant Rose cried. "An' this is the way it'll be. These ships aren't combat loaded, because we thought we were goin' to unload here and train for six months or so. But that's all been belayed. . . ."

There was a murmur of astonishment. Our attention was riveted on the officer. Things were beginning to sound interesting and urgent.

"We are goin' to unload these ships and combat load 'em. An' that's a lot of work. We haven't any time. It's a twenty-four-hour, chop-chop deal, an' every man, every NCO, every officer is going to turn to night and day until this is done. We've got about nine or ten days to do this job."

There was shuffling of feet and a ripple of comment. Lieutenant Rose paused for breath and glanced at his notebook.

"Knock it off, you guys," Trenton snorted. There was quiet again.

Lieutenant Rose cleared his throat. "The work has begun as

of now. The seabags are going to stay here. If there is anything in 'em you want to take with you, you had better get it out. Put stuff you want to leave behind in the seabags and they will be stored here until we get back . . . or they will be sent to wherever we go next. They'll catch up with you, anyway. Don't carry any excess junk . . . no private papers . . . You guys who were shiftin' when wills were made out, should make out wills now . . . and see the first sergeant about this now. . . ."

"I ain't got nothin' to leave but the seabag," Private Bellflower mumbled.

"What the hell you think I got?" I asked him, "an oil well, or something?"

"Leave me your beer," Trenton told Bellflower.

"Fat chance," Bellflower growled. "I'm goin' to take it with me."

"You'll need it down there," I said.

Bellflower grinned, ending with a yawn.

"Now, men . . ." Lieutenant Rose began, waiting for silence again. "Now, men, every man will be on an eight-hour shift, and if we get in a tight, it'll be upped. . . ."

"What about liberty, sir?" Griffiths inquired.

"That's a good question," Lieutenant Rose grinned. "We're giving liberty tonight after shifts are assigned. You are to be here for your shift. . . . When you are off shift, you are to be either sleeping or on liberty, and you'll sign out as to what you are doin'. We'll live aboard the ship for a while, then shift to another one. This ship is not goin', because it is Merchant Marine. We'll be moving off this ship."

There was a ripple of pleasure.

"Get your gear ready now. Take your seabags down and stack them on the pier. They will be taken to a warehouse for storage. You pick up your work shift from the first sergeant. Now, this is serious business . . . there will be no dopping off . . . behave yourselves on shore . . . be here for your shifts." He started to move off, then paused . . . "One more thing . . . you don't know where you're going, so don't try to explain it to anybody. Far as these people know, you are here for a visit. As you know, some of the forward echelon has been here for a while getting the

camp ready for us. These people can't tell you from the forward echelon. Don't try to explain it. Keep your mouth shut. You don't know what you are doing, or why. You are just working on the docks."

That night we dressed in greens and headed for liberty. There had been a payday a couple of days before we came into port. All told, I had about thirty dollars, a small fortune. Trenton, Griffiths, and I were together. We walked through the confusion of the dock. Trucks, loaded with gear, were swinging off the ship and being lowered by winches to the pier. Searchlights played from the decks down on the dock area. The scene was one of massive activity. Cargo was being taken from one ship and hauled by truck to other dock areas. Equipment from other areas was appearing in mounds at ships that were unloading a different cargo. Some ships were loading and unloading at the same time. Boxes of food, ammunition, clothing, stoves, tents, medical supplies, and the thousand and one other items that war consumes were piled high. Human chains of men passed boxes from hand to hand, loading, unloading, stacking. Little groups of Marines, waiting for the next load, stood drinking coffee from canteen cups, or munching sandwiches. Heaters glowed and working parties warmed at them when the chance offered itself.

Armed guards circled gloomy, tarpaulin-covered piles of high explosives. Truck lights played like beacons through the maze of cargo as the vehicles searched for the proper loading area and the right pile of cargo.

A cold, wet wind whipped through the stark confusion of activity. Someone had discovered a broken crate of fur-lined jackets. These began to appear on Marines who struggled in the night. The kitchens of all ships were open, and meals were served twenty-four hours a day . . . coffee and milk were available during the off hours between regular meal times.

A heavy, high, wire fence cut the dock area off from the people of Wellington, many of whom stood, gazing through the wire, wondering what the crazy Marines were doing. The city was blacked out, but the docks were lighted, thundering with

activity. The simultaneous loading and unloading puzzled them, and they could get no explanation. Combat painted trucks moved in and out of the dock areas, mingled with the traffic of the city, and disappeared back toward the docks again. At the same time, Marines dressed in spotless splendor walked the streets, frequented milk bars and fish and chips parlors to eat like starving locust, gobbling everything placed before them. Astonished Wellington restaurateurs served countless steaks with an egg on top, French-fried potatoes, bread and milk for a dollar and a half. Milk bars dished out gallons of ice cream and churned thousands of milkshakes. The wineshops and bars, during the short hours of their operation, were filled with beer, wine, and whiskey drinkers, mostly Marines, all lavish spenders by New Zealand standards.

But this first night, the three of us plowed into a dark unknown. Once we left the dock area, all was darkness. The shops were in blackout, the streets were void and black as a coalbin. We stumbled and pushed toward what we hoped would be civilization. We kept bumping into natives of Wellington, not realizing for a time that they followed the same traffic pattern on sidewalks as they did on their streets—they drove and walked on the left side. We were bumping against the flow of traffic.

We managed to find a milk bar, spotting it by the fact there was a pinpoint of light behind its shutters, and we entered. There we drank several milkshakes, noting with approval the owner took American money and gave change in New Zealand coin. On the cash register was a card breaking down the worth of each currency in terms of the other. We had worried about this. We had been afraid they would take only currency of New Zealand. This was not the case. We rejoiced in the knowledge we could spend our money freely.

Later, we bungled into a fish and chips parlor, discovering it chiefly by the odor of frying fish, and took a table, where we ordered a meal. Next to us were two girls, and it required only a few moments to strike up a conversation. It developed one was a Maori and she lived with the lighter-skinned New Zealand girl. They shared an apartment. The Maoris had a heritage of

cannibalism, but they had stopped serving people for lunch in the 1800s. We discussed New Zealand. In the course of the conversation, Gilberts drifted off, and we joined the natives. Trenton, eager for something stronger than milkshakes, learned to his horror the bars had closed at five o'clock. Everything else, it appeared, closed before 9 P.M., or a few minutes thereafter.

We were invited to the apartment to listen to the radio, an activity of consuming interest, it appeared. We accepted, but only after Trenton learned they had beer at their flat. They guided us through the darkness and finally through a gate in a picket fence, across a porch and into a house. We walked into a parlor where a group of elderly persons was listening to the radio, moved through the bedroom and kitchen and out the back door.

"Where are we going?" Trenton asked the cannibal in surprise.

"Our flat is in the garden," she replied in the night. The weather had turned bitter cold. I was freezing.

"You don't have a door of your own?" I asked.

"No. The only way we can get to our flat is through the house."

"Great God," Trenton breathed. "What do those folks think?"

"What do you mean?" Hazel, who was the other girl, inquired.

"Don't they mind you walking through their house all the time?"

"It's the only way we can get to our flat," the cannibal answered.

We walked over a garden path, winding around bushes until we came to a small dwelling. They opened the door and we went inside. It was one room with a double bed, two chairs, a radio, and an electric heater. The temperature was at least ten below zero.

"I'll turn on the heater," Hazel suggested. "It will warm up in a minute."

"I hope so," I said. I was shaking with the cold.

Hazel went to the cabinet and got four beers. Trenton sat on the bed with the cannibal. They drew a blanket around their shoulders. I sat down on a trunk near the heater. It slowly began to glow, a weak cinder in an icebox. Hazel turned on the radio.



It sputtered and crackled. Soon, though, it produced the most wonderful of sounds: American music played by Americans.

"Where's that coming from?" Trenton asked from the blanket folds.

"San Francisco, California," the cannibal said. "It's the overseas broadcast . . ."

"It's the only thing we listen to," Hazel added. "The music is wonderful. We don't have anything like it here." She opened beer and handed the bottles around.

"Boy, it's pretty," Trenton said.

It was. It was home.

The heater obviously was not going to get very hot. I still shook. Maybe the beer, which was at room temperature and, therefore ice cold, would help. I guzzled as fast as I could. Death would be easier if I were half-soused, I decided.

"I tell you what," I said to the company in general, "how much beer do you have?"

"How much?" the cannibal asked.

"Yes," I said, "and I do not mean to be impolite."

Hazel inspected the cabinet. "A dozen bottles, or so . . . at least a dozen. . . ."

"We'll buy all of them from you, because we need to drink them. In this way you will be our guests and we can drink all your beer without feeling we have been pigs. . . . Can you get more tomorrow?"

"Oh, yes," the cannibal said. "We don't drink it much. This has been here for a long time."

"I'll buy it," I said. I gave her twenty cents a bottle for it. "How about opening several more?"

Hazel opened several more. The cannibal and Trenton were invisible under the blanket.

"Where are you, Trenton?" I inquired.

His muffled voice filtered through the blanket. "It's getting warmer under here," he said.

"Yes," I said. "It must be." I drank two more beers. Trenton's hand appeared from under the blanket. I put a beer in it, and it disappeared.

The music was clear and comforting. Jazz in the Glenn Miller style. I drank another beer. I was still cold. My feet were numb. My hands stiff. My ears frozen. The heater glowed. I could touch the protective grill without burning my fingers.

I looked around the room. Wooden, frame walls. A tattered rug on the floor. Wind passed through one wall and out the opposite side of the place.

"How did you find this place?" I asked.

"Flats are hard to find," Hazel said. "We were lucky to get this one."

"I wonder," I said.

"Oh, yes. It's fine when it is warm."

"I guess so."

Hazel was a faded specimen with light brown hair. Obviously she did not belong to the idle rich. She was not unattractive, but, then, neither is an elephant. She would have been a thin elephant, I decided, had she been an elephant. I felt sorry for her. Life in New Zealand must be as difficult as life in Florida, I thought, remembering the Great Depression.

Trenton and the cannibal had been whispering among themselves. Now they were sitting on the edge of the bed again. Trenton had reached for another beer. I tilted my bottle and drained it. Hazel was not drinking beer; neither was the cannibal. The cannibal was plump and appeared to be in her late thirties. She might have served people in her earlier years, I thought; but, then, I cast such speculation from my mind. The beer was beginning to turn my thoughts elsewhere, as beer can do.

"Where is the head, or men's room, or whatever you call it here?" I inquired.

"The bathroom?"

"Yes," I said to Hazel.

"It's back in the house."

"Back in the *what?*" I was astounded.

"In the house we came through," she said. "You go in the back door and through the kitchen . . . and take a right turn . . . and the door is there . . ."

It was beyond me, but I could not withstand the combination

of beer and cold weather any longer. "I'll be back," I said, getting up. I walked through the garden and into the kitchen of the house. An elderly man was boiling water in a pan. He looked at me with questioning eyes. It was a strange feeling. I had never seen these people in my life. Here I was tromping through their kitchen, using their bathroom.

"Tea?" I commented.

"Quite," he said, peering into the pan.

I walked by. I took a right. There was a door. I opened it carefully, searching for a switch. I found a large knob-type switch on the wall. I turned it. The light came on. It was the bathroom; fortunately empty. I closed the door and locked it. The toilet had a water supply near the ceiling contained in a steel reservoir from which a chain dangled down the wall to belt level. I pulled the chain. There was a crash of water. The walls shook. Water from an unknown height began to pour into the reservoir. The pipe bringing it rattled and shook. The commode gasped and gurgled loudly, as if it were being strangled by unseen hands. From somewhere in the depths of the house there was a groaning sound, something similar to a heavily loaded truck pulling an impossible incline in the lowest of gears. This groaning—which began at an agonizing pitch—gradually faded, growing fainter and fainter and ending with muffled rattles somewhere in the foundations of the house. But water continued to pour into the elevated reservoir. First in loud sloshes, as water falling into a tin tub, then in squirting sounds that gradually gained higher and higher pitch until the stream was a high-pressure discharge cutting the water with a vengeance.

I unlocked the door, almost afraid to come out after having announced to the entire neighborhood my secret activities behind closed doors. But I could not remain in there. So, I could only come out. I did. I moved into the kitchen. The elderly man and the pan of hot water had disappeared. I heard voices outside the kitchen door. As I looked toward the entrance, Trenton and the natives plunged through.

"It's just too cold," Trenton laughed. "And it's eleven o'clock."

"Uh-huh," I said.

"Where is the bathroom?" Trenton asked.

"Right in there," I said, pointing. "Don't let it frighten you."

He moved in the direction I had indicated. "What you mean?"

"Just lock the door," I said.

We chatted in the kitchen. They knew a tea shop that was still open.

"Anything to warm up," I said.

There was a sound of laboring pipes, churning water, thumping plumbing, metallic fingers fumbling with high-pressure water and rattles that vibrated the kitchen walls.

Trenton appeared, his eyes glistening, wide. He was laughing, red-faced and speechless.

"I know about it," I said. "Let's go."

We went through the bedroom and the parlor. They were still in the parlor, each with a cup of tea. The radio was playing. They watched us, much as passengers in a bus station watch people arrive and depart.

"Good night," I said, and went out the front door. I heard no answer.

"I don't think they liked us. They had little to say," I said to the cannibal.

"They don't mind. They just think we will be in late and wake them up."

"I guess so," I replied. "You do have to go through their bedroom, don't you?"

"Yes," she said. "But we usually can slip through without waking them."

"I hope so," Trenton grinned. "I have never seen anything like it."

"Oh, it's a nice arrangement. You can keep up with who's coming and who's going," I said.

The wind was icy. We found the tea shop. We drank tea for a while and warmed up. Then we went back to the *John Ericsson*.

"I'm beat," Trenton said.

"Me, too," I answered.

We climbed the gangplank, checked in, and hit the sack. Our

shift started at 8 A.M. It was warm in the compartment. Warm as toast. I fell asleep. Strange people, these New Zealanders, I thought as I drifted off . . . strange people.

The urgency of our work was in the air. It permeated everything we did. We knew we were on the threshold of battle and this knowledge made everything we did have special significance. The people of Wellington must have sensed this firm application to duty, this hustle, and this day and night labor to complete a task they did not understand and which appeared so strange, confused, and senseless to them. This work on the docks. Work that, as far as the eye could see, never reduced the great mounds of stores there. Labor that moved boxes and crates back and forth. Ships that unloaded and loaded, apparently the same things.

But they seemed to have faith in us. They respected us. Only the café owners grew crusty at times viewing the young, healthy, work-whetted appetites as insufferable gluttony in a war requiring sacrifice of creature comforts. But food was plentiful in New Zealand. Mutton was the most plentiful of all meats, and, evidently, worshiped by the citizenry. Mutton fat provided cooking grease. In this way, in the less elite restaurants, all meats were flavored with mutton. I once ordered pork chops, a meat dear to the hearts of most Southerners. I savored even the thought of pork chops. I awaited the filling of my order with eagerness and pleasure. It appeared. I cut a bite of chop, conveyed it to my mouth, chewed. The pork chop tasted just like mutton. It was the only bite I could eat. I drank my milk; ate everything else, but could only look sadly at my pork chops.

For this reason, most Marines ate steak. Wellington cooks did not cook steak in mutton grease. Wellington steaks were large, tender, and delicious. Wellington steaks were consumed by the thousands.

It was in Wellington we first saw automobiles powered by a device something like a stove mounted on the rear bumper. I never understood how it worked, but it was supposed to burn charcoal. In some way, these things powered the cars. Many

drivers had them, and moved through traffic as well as anyone, smoke pouring from a stack atop the stove.

With the idea of finding some rare, beautiful New Zealand item I could eventually send back home, I walked the streets visiting stores hoping to find such a prize and buy it. Buy it, of course, if it didn't cost more than five dollars. I could find nothing. Everything was made in the United States, with the exception of some canned foods, leather goods, and cigarettes of British make. Of course, I didn't get into every store in Wellington. But those I did visit were stocked heavily with American exports. The bookstores were an exception. They had huge supplies of British books. But American technical books abounded. While I inspected one small bookstore, a box of American books was delivered. The proprietor was happy beyond measure, and unpacked the box immediately. I suppose the shipment had arrived on the *John Ericsson*, as I had watched them load some freight in San Francisco.

The wartime drain on the young male population of Wellington was very evident. Very few young men were to be seen. And they were all in uniform. Most of the soldiers we saw in New Zealand at this time were older men, members of the Home Guard protecting the hearth while the younger men fought and died in Africa and elsewhere in the world. It was a sad thing. Occasionally, a New Zealander would talk about this situation in a bar. The resentment he felt was barely concealed. Most felt their men should be protecting New Zealand closer at hand, and they could not be blamed for such an attitude.

During our short stay, many Marines visited homes of the people of Wellington as Sunday guests, or as guests for a meal. They were treated with unfailing hospitality, respect, and love. Often the host and hostess at these affairs had sons in uniform, or had lost sons in battle. They felt drawn to troops far from home and on the way to meet the enemy. They overlooked the carefree attitude of Marines. They smiled at them and took them into their hearts. The kindness of the people of Wellington was an impressive thing to me and the memory of it is still fresh after all these long years.

At this time, the Japanese dominated the Pacific in all reality. New Zealand was a small outpost surrounded by vast distances and beneath enemy guns. Australia was in the same position, and it was preparing for a Japanese invasion—a possibility of any moment. New Zealand was exposed and the Japanese could have wrought great damage, had they desired to take some risk to accomplish it. So, the people of Wellington tried to show they appreciated our appearance as friends; combat troops from the faraway land of America, whose music they received and enjoyed on their wireless sets, as they called them. They felt they had always known us. For over the long stretches of the Pacific Ocean they had heard our voices, our songs, our newscasts, and our comedians. They used our toothpaste, shaved with our razor blades and drank our soft drinks. They felt near to us. Now we had done what they had hoped and expected we would do. We had appeared at their shores, armed and ready to fight. We had come to them in a time of trouble for both our nations. They appreciated this beyond their ability to express it in words. So, they expressed this thankfulness with kindness and patience and a friendliness beyond mere courtesy. It was an act of love for those who had come so far to fight in neighborhood thickets so close to their beloved homeland.

In my tours of the stores of Wellington, I discovered a money belt, and bought it. It was the wisest purchase I made overseas. I wore it through the long months of Guadalcanal. With it, I was assured of money when I got liberty after battle. Those who did not have money belts eventually were robbed as they slept, or lost their money in some other way. I never lost a cent. I also bought a tobacco pouch of some sort of soft leather. It lasted well, too. Though it would get covered with green mold occasionally, the tobacco was never green, and I used the pouch for years.

We moved to the *Hunter Liggett*, an Army transport ship which was somewhat smaller than the *John Ericsson*, but a better ship, we thought. It had been built to haul troops. The food was fine. It was a good move we all agreed, and we were satisfied.

Now we were settled for the final run. It was only a matter of time. Progress in the reloading was visible. Deck cargo was being hoisted aboard. This meant only one thing: it wouldn't be long now.

It wasn't. On July 22, 1942, we slipped out of Wellington and back into the open sea. We were Task Force 62.1 of Task Force 62. The other half, Task Force 62.2 of Task Force 62, carried assault Marines for Tulagi. We headed for Koro Island, in the Fijis, where we were to make some practice assault landings. We moved along in convoy. There were more ships this time, better escort.

During the trip there was word that a second lieutenant was showing another how to do a fast draw with a .45-caliber pistol. It went off. And the student was killed. The body was taken off in the Fijis for transport back home. One of those sad, frightful, meaningless accidents with pistols. I hated pistols and vowed I would never carry one. I never did. Pistols are dangerous. They have caused too much accidental grief, too many meaningless deaths.

We drew up to Koro around July 28. Orders were we would maneuver, practice hitting the beach. We were ready; anxious to see what the place looked like. But we never saw anything. The officer who had selected the locale must have done so from a travel folder. Coral formations made assault landings too rough, so the sailors got practice on how to pick us up with their landing craft on the day of the real assault. We messed around—for that was all it was—until July 31, when we pulled away and the Fijis dropped out of sight.

"A damned waste of time," Bellflower muttered.

"How the hell do you know?" Gilberts asked. "You slept all the time . . . I bet you ain't been awake four hours a day."

It was true. I worried about it some. Bellflower was not well—if it could be put that way—but he didn't complain of illness. I had thought of taking the matter up with the lieutenant. But what could I say? That he slept all the time? I knew the kind of answer I'd get to that. What was the use? I'd just wait until



I could get him off the ship, then I'd get him at high port and double time.

Lieutenant Rose and the rest of the officers of our little company got us in our compartment and finally announced our target.

Captain George Ringmann did most of the talking. He was the professional type. Sandy-haired, freckles, straight as an arrow, he was quiet, modest, and firm. He rarely appeared before us, as he was busy helping the major.

"Men," he said, "we will hit Guadalcanal on the morning of August 7. It's in the Solomon Islands and the Japanese are completing an airstrip there. The objective is the airstrip, which we are to seize and hold until we are relieved."

We were glad to get the information at long last, but we knew even less about Guadalcanal than we had about New Zealand. It was just a word, as far as we were concerned. And as a word, it had no meaning, as we had never heard it before. We stood there and wondered.

"We will hit Tulagi and Gavutu at the same time. They are small and nearby. Our group will hit Guadalcanal, where the main force of the Japanese is. Now, Tulagi has a good harbor and is the capital of the Solomons group, which is a British possession, or was until the war started. Tulagi has a golf course and a number of houses," Captain Ringmann said.

"Great," Trenton whispered in my ear. "We can play golf. It had me worried. I was afraid I would get rusty."

"Shut up," I said. "The officers will have that. You ain't goin' to play nothin'."

"The biggest island, which is Guadalcanal, has no harbor and the ships will have to unload into small boats, and they, in turn, will unload on shore. The Coast Guard unit we have along will handle this. We'll have the airstrip immediately, then move out to reduce the enemy."

"Captain, what kind of island is this?" Griffiths asked.

"It's pretty large. Has mountains inland. Coconut palms are along the beach . . . and there is jungle at the foot of the

higher ground. Lots of rivers and streams. Good beach for landing. Not much surf."

It didn't sound too bad.

"We have a contact there," the captain added. "He is a Britisher who stayed behind. He has a radio and is up in the mountains with the natives. These natives do not like the Japs. They used to work for the British in the coconut palms. When we land this agent will join us and help us get our bearings. He knows the place."

Lieutenant Rose thanked the captain for his talk. "Now, men," he said, "we'll have some sessions with a map we have of the landing assault area tomorrow. You have to memorize the landmarks so you'll have your bearings if you get separated or cut off. Check your weapons and gear. Be sure everything is shipshape and ready to go over the side."

He left. It was dark. Trenton and I went on deck to try to find a spot. Bellflower and Griffiths followed. We stumbled through the blackout curtains. The sky was spotty and the wind cold. All the good spots were occupied. We found an open space toward the fantail and spread our blankets. The sea was fairly rough. The ship pitched and tossed, its rigging creaking. We could barely make out the vessel behind us as a big, indefinite shadow. There was murmur of conversation all about us. Marines speculating about the future, recalling the past: New Zealand, San Francisco, New River, Verona, Parris Island, home towns.

I rolled up in my blanket. I was tired. The deck felt good; solid steel. The air was cold, clean, filled with salt mist. I slept.

Not far ahead, Japanese soldiers lounged in the tropic heat of Guadalcanal. They planned to have their new airstrip finished by August 6. It was a good strip, wide and safe. It was protected by the Imperial Navy and honorable Nipponese soldiers prepared to die for the Emperor.

The Japanese laughed and hissed around campfires, compared pornographic pictures and drawings, and talked of world conquest and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which they were in the process of expanding. They opened cans of

fish heads and nibbled on them, washing down the feast with pulls from saki bottles. Tomorrow, they would send more soldiers through the mountains in an unceasing effort to capture natives.

The chosen ones—the Japanese—walked the beaches of Guadalcanal and Tulagi. They viewed the clouding skies. More rain soon. But rain was frequent in the Solomons. Finally, eyes heavy with sleep, they slipped into their little wooden houses—houses they had built for shelter from heat and rain—and snuggled into beds secure in knowledge they were the bravest and strongest and safest people in the world.

They thought of Manchuria and Burma. They smiled at the rape of Singapore and Manila. Their minds wandered over the slaughter of Chinese and islanders of the Pacific, and the sweetness of the Bataan death march.

With little hisses of pleasure, they drifted into slumber. The wind tossed the coconut trees and rippled the sand of the beaches. Blackness was over the land and the sea surrounding it.

Far away in the liquid night, moving on swift steel hulls laden with cargoes of war, a test of the beliefs of these Japanese came as silent shadows of destiny, grim and cold. Moved toward the wooden houses and the precious airstrip. And on decks of these black, grim ships, slept men—chosen ones, but not Japanese. These men did not plan to die for an emperor, or for anyone else. They were men who planned to live and to live and to live. In this process of living, these men—these silent, sleeping men—planned to kill the laughing Japanese soldiers, to tear down their little wooden houses, and to rape them with the bayonet.

The thought of dying had not occurred to these men, these American Marines. They had not been taught to die. They had been taught to kill. Dying had not occurred to them.

They did not look upon war as dying. War was killing. Seeking out the enemy and killing. Killing without mercy. Killing for God and country. It was something like being a Boy Scout. You camped out. You killed for God and country. There was no plan to die.

These sleeping Marines planned to kill the Japanese. It was the only gentlemanly thing to do. The Japanese wished to die for the Emperor. Death would please the War Lord Tojo and gratify the Emperor.

The American Marines planned to do this for the lowly Nippon soldier: they planned to help him die.

Thus in the night that shrouded them both—the American Marine and the Japanese soldier of the Solomons—each slept, dreaming dreams. The one dreaming of glorious death for the Emperor; the other dreaming of granting that wish. Thus, each slept as fate set clocks of destiny for the souls involved. And the winds tossed coconut palms, swept decks of silent ships at sea, drew clouds across the heavens, and moistened the air, and moaned, and howled across endless reaches of earth and sky and waters of the deep.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### The Coo of the Cockatoo

Before World War II few Americans had ever heard of the Solomon Islands. Even fewer had any knowledge of the existence of Guadalcanal. Like so many other islands of the Pacific, these bits of land were kissed by a tropical sun and eroded by gentle rains without stirring the attention of the outside world. They were somewhat off the beaten track, without treasure or tourist attractions.

Set in a warm, calm sea, they remained quietly primitive, living evidence of great volcanic eruptions of some prehistoric time when churning waters cast them from the deep to the accompaniment of smoke, fire, and brimstone. After all the excitement was over, they were just left there, high and dry, and there they still are.

Under the control of the British and Australians, the Solomons were known chiefly for production of copra—the dried meat of the coconut—headhunting and the cannibalistic heritage of recently semicivilized natives, and an extremely unhealthy climate where a shirt could become covered with mold while one considered what to do about mildew that had suddenly appeared on one's shoes.

The warm, dank climate of Guadalcanal, as in other islands of this area, is perfect for uninhibited growth of bacteria, fungi, molds, mildews, damps, and rots of all kinds, all shapes, all sizes and varieties. In the lowlands, Guadalcanal is, in fact, one giant incubator properly humidified and at constant temperatures ideally suited to sustain the many exotic germs, protozoa, and unidentified worms it contains.

It is a womb of Nature. In it, reproduction is the theme; reproduction by the millions, by the countless tens of millions. Here birth and life and death can be heard as a constant drone, a factorylike throb of sex in a sexless state of affairs. For it is a mad cycle whipped by blind instinct of senseless creatures, seen and unseen, all insane to perpetuate, to feast, to fertilize, to hatch, to grow, to mate, to wither, fall to earth, die, and rot, all in a blind plan to extend infinite generations of minutia.

Every patch of soil is a home, or a cemetery, or a feasting ground for these pulsating things. Every leaf is a haven, or a meal. Every creature is a parasite, or a host—or both at the same time. Everything is food for everything else, whether living or dead; it makes little difference. From the infinitely small upward to larger and larger beings, everybody is food for everybody else, both up and down the scale of life. Literally and visibly, this is true. It is Nature's way. It is life at its most sickening, primitive and revolting level. It is life in such abundance, it has no dignity. Life has no value; it is not precious.

Here life is sustenance. It is food. And when life has been drained away, the husk that contained it is consumed; it is nipped, chewed, torn, pecked, and stripped. It disappears. Its form goes. But it does not go—this husk that carried a life—it is eaten and becomes an ant, or a butterfly, or, possibly, a land crab. In any event, it will not be *that* long. The cycle will sweep it full circle, and it will become a husk again to be divided, consumed and absorbed as a part of a million things, all living, breathing, moving, reproducing, throbbing with life.

Nothing is safe from this onslaught of living and eating. No man, no cloth nor leather, wood or thing, is safe from it. It is

only a matter of time until the living are chewed and digested.

Life teems. It teems in all the horrifying connotation of that word. It pulsates with fertility, passion, and a richness that turns the stomach and freezes the heart in horror of its abundance and insatiability. Life is so rich, its bloom so lush, it is soft, rather than firm and strong. And it assumes a radiance so brilliant—a ripeness so perfect and plush—it balances on the edge of decay, which is, indeed, its next step. Life here is like a peach, large, round, pink and at the very crest of maturity, which, when squeezed is found to be a yielding, tender thing, a mush cloaked beneath thin, blushing, and delicate skin.

It is here, under these conditions, the human body is a perfect media for the ravishing microscopic hordes, the hungry insects and molds and fungi. It is here the living begin to decay and to dissolve while still alive. Age makes no difference. Human beings rot. Purulent fluids, the muck of infectious cocci, spirilla, and bacilli, drip from broken skin to seep into other areas of the body carrying infection that erupts into jagged erosions of decay and death. While these little channels rot and expand in size, flies feast at their banks, cover their feet in the oozing scabs as waders along a seashore stand in the shallows. Flies by the hundreds, loud and joyous and persistent, sticky with a thousand hops in pools of pus and fetid fluids, flit away to spread their infectious cargoes and deposit them in bright, fresh scratches and nicks hardly visible on naked skin.

Mosquitoes hum in throaty concert through the hot dampness. They breed in murky sloughs, cupped palm fronds, wet logs, stagnant pools, and matted brush of the jungle floor. Breed by the tens of millions, and are hatched, emerge into the air winged and hungry, mad for food. They circle, drone with pleasure, dive, and carefully select a warm patch of human or animal skin to drive the delicate needle that is a mouth; then they inject a fluid seething with malaria in exchange for rich blood. Carefully they drink, standing on their heads, back feet in the air, wings folded. Then they hum away in the light breeze.

Ants crawl incessantly. Great red ants. Huge black ants. Small pink ants. Tiny ants. Middle-sized ants. Ants with great heads

and pincers. All busy. All eating. All moving, laying eggs, reproducing. They crawl over food. Cover blankets. Fall into water. Swarm over shoes. Bite. Sting.

Spiders drop from tropical brush and trees. Drop like pellets, great hairy legs spread. They weave thick webs of great strength; webs like cord covered with glue, cunningly placed at various heights and strung from trees, twigs, waving grasses. Spiders scurry across the earth heavy with eggs, glittering of eye, nasty. They fall, hurrying with dainty feet across necks and down sleeves. Or they squash in gory clods beneath an unsuspecting hand.

Scorpions, broiled-red in color—large, vicious-looking things, unafraid—frequent bases of trees to warn the plagued human being of venom with jerky movements of caliper-like pincers held high and waved by jointed-tail action.

This is the paradise of which poets sing in their odes to the South Pacific. This is what the natives wash out of their hair. This is the happy hunting grounds of the brown maiden who bathes in the clear, cool, blue-green waters of Hollywood's Technicolor islands. This is the romantic spot where lovers generated by the moviemakers fall into lush vegetation to embrace half-nude while a hillbilly guitar plucker bays at a moon framed by a coconut tree conveniently tilted on the languid shore.

These are the islands of which every virile male dreams when he considers a life of irresponsibility, romance, sex, and salvation. It is here he thinks one must only eat, mate, and belch, happily content with Nature and all her works.

Guadalcanal is more than 7000 miles from the Forbidden City in San Francisco. It is about 10,000 miles from Jacksonville, North Carolina, and Verona. It is below the equator from these places and across the international date line. Prayers offered up in our behalf by the good citizens who had known us there were received the day before they were sent, if you want to look at it that way, and this probably helped us more than we ever realized.

Alvaro de Mendaña de Neyra, the Spanish mariner and explorer, is credited with having discovered the Solomons about



1567. He thought he had found the very spot King Solomon of Biblical fame had mined the gold for his temple, an expensive building somewhat less structurally sound than the Egyptian pyramids made of more common materials.

Of course, the Solomon Islands were not as imagined by Mendaña. But Columbus thought he had discovered India when he found the New World, so Mendaña should not be condemned, but, rather, pitied.

After sailing away to tell of his find, it unfortunately developed no other explorer could duplicate Mendaña's feat. In light of the tall tale he must have told, this loss of the newly found Solomons may have caused considerable bitterness in navigational circles. Possibly, Mendaña was looked upon as a cad and a liar of considerable ability. However, he was redeemed, but too late for him to appreciate the victory. Two hundred years passed before a French navigator, Louis de Bougainville, with all the patience and thoroughness of his breed, rediscovered the Solomons in 1768. How everyone remembered Mendaña had named the islands "Solomons" is a mystery. But they did. So much for history.

In modern times, the Solomons came to the attention of the world on March 13, 1942, when the Japanese landed and took over, chasing cannibals into the hills, raping any female head-hunters they could catch, and making camp where they pleased. This did not cause as much interest at the time as it should have. But, then, the Japanese had been doing all these things to much larger and more prominent places, such as: New Guinea, Java, the Philippines, Malaya and the East Indies, Shanghai, and a few hundred other points. The Solomons were little known. The world press did not wring its hands over either their seizure or their loss.

On Guadalcanal, the Japanese established camp in and behind coconut groves rising from the plains of the northern coast, where the land is a smooth, lush sweep with a good beach, but no harbor. Inland a little way, they cut their airstrip in preparation to harass shipping lanes linking Australia and New Zealand with the United States.

To them this was a further step in the realization of an international Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which would culminate with a mighty banzai at Washington, D.C., where War Lord Tojo asserted he would sign the peace treaty. However, Tojo was unable to do as he had planned, losing face in the process.

Guadalcanal rises sharply from the sea on its southern coast, making this area unfit for assault landings. But on the northern side, where the Japanese had conveniently located, Lunga Plain, named after the Lunga River which pours from the mountains of the interior into the ocean at that point, the beaches are fine and the terrain flat. In this area, a smooth beach dissolves into a coconut grove and grassy meadows and jungle. Also, the coral reef characteristic of such Pacific islands is open on the northern side, allowing boats to approach easily.

"Beach Red," the assault impact area for the First Marine Division, was a 1600-yard stretch of sand east of the Illu and Tenaru Rivers on the northern side of Guadalcanal. From it, Marines were to move west and inland to sweep over Japanese camping grounds, seize the airfield and establish themselves.

About three days from the Solomons our Task Force ran into heavily overcast skies and rain squalls. Whitecaps topped the waves, the sun did not penetrate cloud layers above us, and the view over a leaden ocean was one of misty gray-gloom broken by periodic showers whipped by gusts of wind.

Topside was wet, cold, and slick. Deck dwellers were driven below where the air was not so fresh, but was, at least, dry and warm.

The wet gloom added to an air of expectation, tension and uncertainty which had been building up since the flop of the landing exercises in the Fijis. The wet hours of our final run to Guadalcanal were filled with argument and rehashing of the bungle. We considered the stop at the Fijis a complete waste of time and effort. An iron wall of secrecy as to who had actually selected the Fiji location was never breeched by

the enlisted men. This, in itself, stimulated talk and helped to pass the time.

Nevertheless, the Marines were disgusted by the obvious slipup. This state of mind was reflected in an incident aboard the *Hunter Liggett* as the ship stood off the Fijis not long after the word was passed there would be no practice landings due to coral formations that would rip bottoms out of boats and tear the flesh of assault parties.

On this particular day, the sea was smooth and the weather was bright and hot. Marines lounged on the decks. Cancellation of the landings had finally filtered down to the ranks. The enlisted men were gum beating and fanned out about the situation. Tank lighters, Higgins boats, and barges circled the transports, churning about in all directions. Marines lined the rails watching for some incident to break the monotony of inaction, much as elderly men of small towns warm benches on courthouse lawns.

A Higgins boat pulled along side a cargo net hung over the side of the *Hunter Liggett*. A first lieutenant, laden with combat gear, swung from it and began an ascent of the net to the deck. Marines, elbows propped on deck rails, watched this routine act with disinterested eyes. The Higgins boat began backing away.

At this moment, the lieutenant lost his grip on the net and plunged backward into the sea, sending up a mighty splash as his pack slapped the water and dragged him down.

"Well, I'll be damned!" a feather merchant cried. "He fell in." The young Marine pointed downward, his cigarette dangling from the center of his lips.

"Wonder if he'll drown," a voice growled from a knot of enlisted men forming as Marines moved in for a closer look.

"That pack ought to take him right on down . . . But he's supposed to know how to get out of it under water," the feather merchant said. "I wonder if he can."

"Where is he?" a late arrival shouted.

"Under water."

The lieutenant had not reappeared. The coxswain of the Hig-

gins boat, who had heard the splash, was searching the water with his eyes. He had cut his engine, afraid he would chop up the officer with the screws.

"There he is!" a Marine cried, pointing to a spot not far from where the net dangled in the water.

"Ain't he wet, though?" the feather merchant observed.

Marines lined the rails, leaned out for a better view. The surface of the water was about twenty-five feet below them. The officer was struggling in an area between the bow of the Higgins boat and the ship's side. Being alone, the coxswain could not control the boat and make a rescue at the same time. He couldn't leave the helm, as the boat might drift to the ship and crush the lieutenant between the hulls. The officer was fighting water. It was all he could do to keep afloat. Evidently, he was not a good swimmer, but good enough to keep his head above the water.

The enlisted men watched with deep interest. The officer sank, but recovered, and then there was more splashing. He was trying to make it back to the net. His progress was very slow. The weight of his equipment was dragging him down. His strength was being expended in the effort to remain above water.

"I don't think he'll make it," a voice from the gallery observed quietly to the crowd in general.

"Oh, hell yes, he will," came a reply. "We ain't lost an officer yet."

"Well, you wan' to bet?" There was a touch of belligerency edging the voice. "You wan' to bet?"

"Bet on what? They ain't goin' to let him drown . . . They ain't goin' to . . ."

A Marine captain pushed his way through the knot of men. "What's goin' on here?" he demanded as he approached the rail.

"Sir, an officer . . . uh . . . he looks like a second lieutenant . . . has fell off the net down there . . . an' he's awash," the feather merchant answered. "Uh . . . make way for the captain,"

he cried. "Make way there at the rail, you guys, the captain wants to observe the accident."

Marines moved quickly to one side. The captain reached the rail and leaned out. The lieutenant was still splashing, but was tiring.

"Great God!" the captain growled. "Why hasn't a man gone over the side to help this officer?" He glared around the circle of men.

There was no reply. Marines watched the activity in the water; others watched the captain.

"Man overboard!" a voice at the far edge of the group shouted. A newcomer, evidently.

"Some yardbird just got the word," a private commented from the depths of the crowd.

The captain's eye fell on a sergeant. "Sergeant," he bellowed, "move some men over the side at once. That officer might drown. Get some men down there at once, by God!"

"Yes, sir," the sergeant replied, and saluted. But before he could say anything else, several Marines were moving swiftly down the cargo net. The sergeant joined them.

The captain turned to the observers. "Damn it, why didn't you men move out when this man fell?" he shouted, his face red.

"It just happened, sir. Just happened, like that," the feather merchant said. "We were stunned."

The captain sputtered. "Why . . . why . . . by God, he could have been killed . . . damn it! Next time, you people move out on the double and lend a hand immediately . . . by God . . . damn it . . . why, damn it!"

As the Marines dropped down the net, the lieutenant, panting and pale, reached the rope edging, and began pulling himself from the water. Marines on the net pulled on him, using straps on his pack as handles. They helped him as he made the climb. He swung over the rail, water pouring from his pack and shoes, dripping from his helmet. He sloshed down the deck to his quarters.

"He didn't even thank those guys for saving him," the feather merchant said.

"Saving him? What the hell did they do? Nothin'!" a voice snapped from the crowd.

The group thinned out, leaned on the rail, watched the water. The Higgins boat had gone. Maybe something else would happen. But nothing did, and the *Hunter Liggett* finally pulled out for the Solomons.

Now it was rainy and gloomy.

Yet, this condition was good fortune. It was a godsend. It meant enemy patrol planes from the Solomons area would be grounded. Visibility from enemy ships, which swept the seas dominated by the Land of the Rising Sun, was greatly reduced.

Our convoy moved under a protective cloak, hidden under great folds of mist which would enable our attack to fall upon the Japanese without warning.

Though danger of being spotted by enemy submarines was always present, and danger that a surface vessel would stumble across us was acute, the weather favored us, giving us better odds than the enemy.

We needed this advantage deep in enemy territory, far from our homeland, far from our base of supply. We were not of overwhelming strength. All Marine units aboard the convoy amounted to only 18,146 enlisted men and 956 officers. We were a small force spread thin. In a sense, *we* were the war in the Pacific, as far as the United States was concerned. We were an emergency measure; a unit sent to try to keep supply lines to Australia open by denying the Solomons to the Japanese—especially by denying them the airstrip on Guadalcanal. This very assault operation had been determined almost as a second thought. It had been ordered in haste. There had been no time for long military conferences, extensive planning. Efforts had to be made to get maps after the assault had been ordered. Nothing about the islands to be struck by American Marines was known for certain. The number of Japanese troops on the Solomons was not known accurately, though, fortunately, overestimated.

Our mental attitude as we moved into combat was akin to that of explorers penetrating strange bogs of an unknown forest. We were surrounded by mysteries. We were not sure what would happen to us, or what we would find when we plunged ashore. We had been told we were to take the airstrip and hold it. We knew we could. We did not doubt it. Scuttlebutt was that the Army would relieve us sixty-four hours after we took the objective. The "sixty-four-hour deal" was text for many long hours of speculation during the more than four-month Guadalcanal operation. No one ever knew if there had been such a plan. If there had been, it had failed.

Our convoy moved unceasingly. All the aircraft carriers available at the time were with us, though not in view of the transports. Indeed, we never saw them; only their airplanes and the heroic pilots in them.

These carriers included the *Saratoga*, *Enterprise*, and *Wasp*. With them was a strong screening force of cruisers, destroyers, and the battleship *North Carolina*, which is today permanently at Wilmington, North Carolina, as a memorial to that state's war dead.

Transporting Marines to Guadalcanal were the ships *Fuller*, *American Legion*, *Bellatrix*, *Hunter Liggett*, *McCrawley*, *Libra*, *Elliott*, *Barnett*, *Betelgeuse* (called *Beetle Goose* by Marines), *Alchiba*, *President Hayes*, *Crescent City*, *President Adams*, *Alhena*, and *Formalhaut*.

In the same convoy, but to land at Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanam-bogo, were *President Jackson*, *Neville*, *Heywood*, and *Zeilin*, and the destroyer escort group: *Gregory*, *Colhoun*, *McKean*, and *Little*, which were World War I vessels.

The final hours before D-day were employed in checking personal equipment, sharpening the knives we had bought in Jacksonville and San Francisco and the regulation bayonets. Larger weapons carried as deck cargo were cleaned and checked. Packs were carefully stuffed with extra bits of food, extra cigarettes and little odds and ends that might have some use or personal significance.

Final letters were written to be left aboard ship in the hope

that sometime in the months ahead they would reach their destinations. We were not allowed to say anything about plans for the immediate future, so the letters were filled with sweet nothings. Most were lacking in content and dull. It is difficult to write interesting letters under such conditions. We had filled out prepared post cards—inserting our unit number and signatures—on board the *John Ericsson* before we left San Francisco. These were to be mailed when we reached our destination. Our unit number was 900, and we could be reached in care of the postmaster, San Francisco.

We got little sleep the night before the assault. Almost everyone dozed during the afternoon. But now, with combat only hours away, excitement was too high. Sleep was out of the question. Only Bellflower snored in his sack. It was an abnormal thing, and it struck me with some force. Until now, we had laughed about it. But this was no laughing matter. Whatever he had should be treated.

"I told you something is wrong with the guy," Trenton reminded me when I mentioned Bellflower to him.

"I know it," I replied, somewhat put out. "But what the hell? How could I take him to the sick bay and just say he's sick because he likes to sleep."

Trenton nodded. "They would lock you in the brig."

"Yes, indeed. And Bellflower's feelings would suffer."

"No, he'd be asleep."

"I guess so," I said. "But what should I do?"

"He's your private; not mine," Trenton reminded me helpfully.

"That's a great help." I was worried. The eight-ball might konk out when the squad needed him most.

"If he does it on the island, turn him in."

"They shoot people for sleeping on battlefields," I said.

"Well, he knows that. He'll just get undisturbed sleep that way."

"There is something in what you say." I thought about it for a while. "I'll give him the works, if he keeps this up. I just think he's lazy."



"It's the worst case I ever saw," Trenton laughed. "I ain't ever seen anybody sleep like he does, unless they were drunk, or something."

"Well, it's 'or something,' because he isn't drunk. Maybe he has worms."

"No."

"Well, why not? The worms would sap his strength and lay him out." I liked the idea. It was no doubt the solution to Bellflower's problem. Anyone who believed the sun moved around the earth must come from a place where hookworms dwelt in great numbers.

"He don't pick his nose, or anything." Trenton sat down on a bunk. "If he had worms he would pick his nose and scratch . . . and he would eat a lot."

"He doesn't eat more than anybody else," I agreed.

"It isn't worms."

"Well, I guess not; it's too simple." The idea had sounded pretty good. But Trenton was right; Bellflower didn't have the symptoms.

"Get up, Bellflower," I said, punching him with my finger. He opened his eyes and grunted. "Get up, lad. Get your gear packed and stand by. We're about to hit the beach."

He sat up on the edge of the bunk, yawning. "We there?"

"In a couple of hours," I said. "Get your stuff ready and don't forget your rifle, or anything."

He nodded and slid from his sack.

It was around midnight. All of us did our final packing—toothbrushes, shaving kits, extra cigarettes, combs, matches—made horseshoe rolls with our blankets and ponchos and tied them on our packs. That took care of everything. All we had to do was slip into the harness and buckle on web belts with ammunition, bayonet, and canteen.

Guards had been posted at each exit to the decks. They prevented anyone without special permission from getting on deck. This was to keep us from being swept by gunfire, should our ship be attacked. However, we didn't like the arrangement. It gave us a trapped feeling. But there was nothing we could do

about it. Trenton and I found a passageway that was empty and walked to the door. The guard was standing on deck. He wouldn't let us out, but allowed us to stand at the opening and look into the darkness. We could see nothing, and gave up.

In the hour just before dawn, our speed seemed to decrease. We were barely under way. We had approached the western tip of Guadalcanal, swung around it in a long, shallow arc, and headed toward the northern coast passing Savo Island on our port side. Savo was a small sentinel island off Cape Esperance on Guadalcanal and in Sealark Channel between Guadalcanal and Florida Island. The other part of our convoy split from us as we approached Savo and passed the small dot of land on the starboard side of its ships, heading for Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanam-bogo, which are cupped, as if in a partially closed hand, by Florida Island.

Shortly before 6 A.M., August 7, 1942, warships of our convoy began bombardment of Guadalcanal and the other islands. We heard the rumble of guns fired in anger for the first time in our lives. The sound was authoritative, businesslike, and sobering.

Trenton and I went back to the hatch and looked out. A lone Japanese gun was firing in our direction from Guadalcanal. Tracers from it came toward us and fell into the sea. We were well out of range. The weapon appeared to be a 20-mm anti-aircraft weapon depressed to fire horizontally.

An American vessel was firing as it moved slowly between us and the islands. Its guns made harsh, sharp cracking sounds followed by muffled "thrumps" ashore as the shells exploded. It fired in patient, unhurried majesty. After each broadside, the warship disappeared behind smoke.

The Japanese gun ceased to fire. Early light of dawn revealed no life on the island. But, then, it was too far off to tell much. The sky was bright, clear, almost cloudless. There was little breeze. We were allowed to go on deck. The air was heavy; sultry and humid. We perspired. The sun was already warm. The *Hunter Liggett* was dead in the water. Higgins boats, tank

lighters, ramp boats churned busily up and down. The net was over the side.

The scene was almost unreal. It was difficult to realize one was a part of it. There was a strange, detached feeling. The excitement of the night had worn off. It was very much like a practice maneuver. Nothing like the wars I had read about.

About 6:47 A.M., Marines who were to hit in the first wave began going over the side. The sea was so smooth, both sides of the transports could be used for unloading. Winches were swinging loaded Jeeps and trucks over the side and lowering them into tank lighters. Planes from the carriers began flying over Guadalcanal, dropping bombs and strafing.

Landing craft carrying the first wave circled and began to form on a line between two destroyers about 5000 yards from the beach. They began the run. We started loading, went down the cargo net and got our places in the boat. We began to circle, fumes from the boat's exhaust drifted over us. It seemed we circled for hours, but it wasn't nearly that long. We drew up between the destroyers. The engine picked up speed and we headed in. We watched the island take form. It seemed to be half-sunk in the sea. Very low. Vegetation looked thick. We moved rapidly. The distance shortened. Tall palms began to separate from the blurred mass of green. The boat's engine turned even faster. Its noise rose in pitch to become a whine.

"Everybody down," Lieutenant Rose said.

We sank to one knee. Now we could see nothing. We could feel the vibration of the boat beating against our knees. The engine slowed. The bottom scraped. We were at the beach. We got to our feet and went over the side, landing in wet sand. Half-bent from the waist, we ran inland, across the beach, into a grove of trees. We were ashore. There was no enemy there to greet us. It was 10:30 A.M. We were one hour and ten minutes behind the first Marines to set foot on the island.

We moved farther inland, but we could still see the beach. There we halted to wait. Our truck had not reached the beach. It was coming in on a tank lighter. We had arrived on a Higgins boat. We were also waiting for word on the first wave. Evidently,

they had not hit any resistance. But the line had to be coordinated. We watched more boats arrive and got a kick out of the expressions of Marines as they jumped out and charged across the beach. They didn't know what to expect—no more than we had—and they always had an expression of surprise when they found everything quiet.

There were shouts in heavy brush a little way inland from us. The undergrowth crashed and there was gunfire. Hogs squealed and one bounded from the tall, dry grass, turned tail, and disappeared. There was more firing and squealing.

"They're giving them pigs hell," Bellflower said.

They were. The first wave, we discovered, was still in shouting distance from us. They were engaged in a fire fight with wild pigs.

"It's a dumb pig who charges around making noise today," I said.

There were some paced shots from a Browning automatic rifle. A piercing squeal rent the air and there was sound of wild running in the brush.

"They ought to of told them guys they was to fight Japs, not pigs," Bellflower remarked.

The confusion died down.

Some tanks landed and ground noisily across the beach and through the coconut grove. They rattled to an assembly point near us. With much backing and turning, the tanks scattered themselves among the trees. Their engines grew silent. These were light tanks. They looked very much like tin cans; they looked light. And they were. The heavier tanks of the Germans I had seen in newsreels made these look pitifully weak. I was glad I did not have to ride inside one. But they were good against light-arms fire. They had protection enough for that. But at the same time, I had no desire to test even this capacity. To put it bluntly, these tanks looked cheap, comical.

We heard the air-raid alarms of the ships. The excited *whoop-whoop-whoop* drifted to us over the water. This possibility had not occurred to me. There were plenty of planes in the sky, but they were ours. I looked up. The Navy planes which had been

flying fairly low over the ships and the island itself were gaining altitude and disappearing.

"Air raid . . . air raid . . . air raid . . ." was shouted on the beach.

Trenton came trotting toward us. He had been watching the activity of the boats coming in with cargo.

"The word is about seventy Japanese planes are on the way. They'll be here in about fifteen minutes, or less. I guess it will be less."

Lieutenant Rose lighted a cigarette.

I looked around for some shelter. There was none. The tanks were a nice target, if the planes were looking for such things. They were seventy-five feet away. I looked up. The coconut trees towered above me. They were at least a hundred feet tall, possibly more, and their palm fronds formed an umbrella of green. Only patches of sky could be seen. The trees were pretty effective camouflage, as their fronds almost touched those of their neighbors. I considered digging a foxhole. We had not dug in. There had not seemed to be a necessity, as we were to move almost immediately; we had air cover, and the Japanese had apparently withdrawn before our landing.

"Well, Lieutenant, what do we do?" I asked.

"Not much we can do. I guess we had better hit the deck when they show up. It's better than standing up."

"Yes, sir," I said.

We looked out to sea. The transports, which had seemed so safe and secure when we went down the landing nets, didn't look too good now. They stood out like a light on the calm water. The landing craft were scattered, circling, and some of them were moving farther out to sea. Some of the transports were under way, landing nets still dragging water at their sides. Their engines were churning the water, causing white frothy foam that could clearly be seen in the bright sunlight. They were making an effort to scatter and trying to get up enough speed to maneuver, if they had to—and it looked as if they were going to have to.

I thought of our helpless position on the beach. We had not

been ashore long enough to get organized. If the enemy planes went after us instead of the ships—and if the Japanese troops counterattacked at the same time—we were dead ducks. The enemy air raid was hitting at the most delicate time in the Marine assault: some Marines were ashore, some were caught in the landing boats, and many were aboard ship. In fact, more Marines were aboard the transports than there were ashore. We were caught divided three ways, and almost helpless. The Marines on the ships and boats were completely helpless. Those of us ashore were weak in numbers, without supplies, outnumbered by the enemy and without sufficient territory conquered. Most of the supplies were on the transports . . . most of the ammunition was there . . . all the heavy weapons were there.

The more I thought about it, the more serious it looked to me. But I was positive in my own mind our Navy planes would triumph. The Japanese would never destroy our shipping, I told myself.

As I watched the frantic action on the water, the deck guns of the ships—antiaircraft weapons and machine guns—opened up from the transports and warships. Puffs of smoke began to dot the sky. Rings of black, rings of smoke accompanied by deep pops high in the air, began to polka-dot the space above the channel as gunners tried to bring down Japanese planes that had slipped through our air cover farther out to sea.

Dogfights between Japanese fighter planes and American craft began over the ships. The planes were diving, looping, chasing about the sky over the transports in a mad dance, marking paths with trails of white and filling the air with sounds of machine-gun fire, zooming, powerful engines crying with high-pitched voices as they answered demands of pilots engaged in personal combat.

Bombs began to fall into the water near the ships, throwing white geysers of brine high above the surface of the sea with deep, watery *c-r-u-m-p-s* of sound. Through this the landing boats zigzagged, circled and looped like water beetles caught in a mill race.

The scene, which only a few moments before had been one of businesslike activity, was now one of utter frenzy, confusion,

struggle. It was a mad, boiling thing without order or plan. The sky was now pock-marked with puffs of black, streaked with thick smoke of falling planes, filled with sound and fury. It was unreal, as we watched from shore; a majestic display of life and death, of anger, destruction, and desperation.

What horror it would be, I thought, if the Japanese ignore the shipping and attack the beach; if they strafe our beachhead and bomb it. It would be slaughter. The men and supplies were still confined to a rather small area. Concentrated. Bombs and machine guns could kill most of us, or wound us, and there would be no help for us against a thing we could not fight, or stop, or avenge.

This possibility froze my blood. For the first time I realized human beings were bent upon killing me, personally. The thought had never entered my mind. My own death had never been considered by me. But now, that very real possibility flooded my mind with crystal clarity. With a great rush, and all at once, it was known to me. I had become aware of what every Marine soon realizes, with shock and astonishment, that he is expendable. His life can be traded for a few feet of ground, or a few minutes of time, or exchanged for nothing at all, no gain at all; his life can be paid as a debt, only; a debt to war. It came to me that a Japanese would no more hesitate to kill me than I would hesitate to slay him. He *would*. I could expect no mercy. There would be no negotiation. It would either be I would kill him, or he would kill me. It would be either by deliberate action, or by accident; but one of us would kill the other. It would not be heroic, but routine. Death might come to me, personally.

Of course, those who have not been in battle think they realize the possibility of death. But the possibility is not thought of in a personal way. It is something that happens to someone else. It is the same with life generally. Death is an unfortunate thing that happens to others. This sort of knowledge of death is the common knowledge of it. It is a fact known, but not understood. There is a great and large difference in knowledge and understanding. Much can be known, but little is understood. In the case of death, it is neither understood nor known on a

personal level. Its possibility is always present, but individually considered remote.

Now the possibility of death seemed to me to be very close. It was on a personal level. I could see it in the sky above me and on the waters before me. Though I was in no present danger, for the air battle was concentrated over the ships, the danger was visible and the thought of a concentrated attack by even two or three enemy planes churning the beach with bullets and bombs was chilling. There was a feeling of complete helplessness. Nothing those of us on the beach could do would make the slightest difference in the contest raging in the mid-morning sun. So, we did what we had been doing: we waited to see what would happen. We waited for the blow to fall, if it were to fall, and we armed ourselves with the hope it would be denied us and we would be spared.

With guilt we entertained a sense of relief that the Japanese were blinded to us and their eyes were filled only with the sight of our shipping. With shame we were glad they had not thought of us on the beach, or if they had, had not thought us of any importance at this stage of the conflict. We were rejected as targets. And we were glad. We watched, our emotions locked within ourselves, as the attack sputtered and died. The enemy was driven off. Our relief on the beach was deep and reverent. The landing craft began to appear at the beach again and discharge men and cargo. Our truck arrived and joined us. On it was our ammunition. With it was our 37-mm cannon, our machine gun, our water.

We were ordered to move west. Cross the Tenaru and move through the coconut grove. The river was deeper than we had thought. The truck could not cross it. We spread out to find a ford, and near the surf on the beach, we found a sandspit we felt would bear the weight of the truck and allow us to cross. So, we moved and ventured into the shallows where fresh and salt water met, the gears of the truck grinding in low as we slowly crossed. We had no desire to get stuck at this point, and we hopefully prayed our luck would hold as the distance gradually diminished and solid land drew nearer and nearer.



We rode the truck. The coconut grove was planted in straight rows parallel with the beach. In it, looking forward, backward, or to the left or right, the trees presented straight lines. Their trunks were at least three times the diameter of a telegraph pole and rose high above our heads. We tried to watch for snipers, but the trees were too high to make anything out at their tops. A man could hide there easily. He would be very difficult to see. But none had, for no shots were fired at us, and we saw no Japanese, living or dead.

Beneath the trees, the brush had been cleared. There was an unobstructed view similar to standing in a maze of posts stuck into the ground. We drifted inland as we followed the grove, leaving the immediate vicinity of the beach. We found a road, followed its twists and turns beneath the trees. Shortly, we came to a clearing with a tumbled-down shed, debris scattered about, an abandoned Japanese cannon, and a group of Marines eating from cans.

Our truck halted. We got out. Lieutenant Rose joined another officer. We went up to the Marines eating. It was past lunch-time, we were hungry. Breakfast had been many hours ago.

"Where'd you get the chow?" I asked a sergeant.

He was holding a can of pineapples, eating the slices with his fingers. His mouth was full. "Over there." He indicated the shed. "This was a chow dump."

Several of us went into the shed. There were cans with Japanese labels scattered everywhere. Some were still in cases. I picked up a can. I could tell nothing from the label. All Japanese. I opened it with my bayonet. Pineapples. I tried a slice. It was sweet and good. It was a half-gallon can. Bellflower fished in it and took out several slices. Trenton came up and did the same.

"Try a couple of more cans," I said. "Maybe we can find a variety."

Bellflower opened a can. "What th' hell?" he said in a shocked voice.

I looked in it. Fish heads, the eyes of the dead creatures were staring into mine.

"They look good, Bellflower," I said. "Try one and let me know."

"I ain't eatin' that crap," he asserted with some heat.

"Give 'em to Trenton," I suggested. "He likes exotic foods. I heard him say that to those Chinese girls in San Francisco."

Bellflower got up and looked around for Trenton. He spotted him a few feet away, picked up the can of fish heads and went over to him.

I watched with amusement.

"Corporal, have some meat with your pineapples," Bellflower said, shoving the can under Trenton's nose.

Trenton turned and without looking plunged his fingers into the can, bringing up a fish head.

"J. C. Christ . . . what the hell . . ." he cried, dropping the head on the ground, where the cold eyes looked up at him reproachfully.

"Exotic foods," I shouted to him. "The other end is in another can."

"They eat that stuff?" Trenton was shaken.

"Sure. Why not?"

"What do they do with the fish? Where is the part we eat?"

"In another can," I said, though I didn't have the slightest idea where the rest of the fish was. "You don't put all your goodies in one can, you know."

Bellflower had gone to offer his prize to others. There was much interest in the fish heads. Bellflower was followed by a small group of Marines, all eating pineapple slices, as he offered his fish heads to the gathering.

He came back to me.

"What do you want me to do with this stuff?" he asked.

"Throw them away, unless you want to eat fish heads and become a slopehead," I said.

"Who the hell wants such stuff as this? I don't see nothin' on 'em to eat . . . eyeballs, scales, and bones." He was gazing into the can.

"It's the gravy that's good," I said. "That juice in there. Fish

head juice. Greased fish heads and worms with sour cream served in a magnolia blossom is considered high living."

"You don't say?" Bellflower was amazed.

"Aw, throw 'em away, over there," I told him, pointing to a burning pile of lumber.

He threw them in the fire.

We got back into the truck, taking a few cans of food each, hoping we had not selected all fish heads. We had landing rations, which were chocolate bars said to contain several hundred calories each. They tasted awful, but were guaranteed to keep you alive. We were glad to find real food in cans. So, we took what we could without appearing hoggish.

Our truck moved down the road and re-entered the coconut grove. We drew near the beach and stopped again. Here we stayed. It was growing late in the afternoon and we had to form lines for the night. We set up our weapons and dug shallow foxholes long and wide enough in which to stretch out. In these we made a bed with our ponchos and blanket. These holes would protect us from small-arms fire and bombs, if the bombs didn't hit too close.

Our ships began to move out to sea at dusk. They would head for the open water and cruise during the night to reduce danger of night bombing or submarine attacks. Tomorrow early, they would return and continue unloading operations. Some 11,000 Marines were now ashore. Supplies were piled on the beach.

Landing parties had run into trouble at Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanambogo, we heard. The Japanese were dug in on Tulagi. And on Gavutu, assault Marines had run into heavy machine gun and small-arms fire. An attempt to take Tanambogo, which was connected to Gavutu by a causeway, was thrown back by the enemy. The assault force sent against these enemy holdings had been 1500 Marines. Evidently, it wasn't enough. But the action was continuing, though all we knew of it was by scuttlebutt. The islands were too far away for us to hear anything, and were out of sight of our position.

The units to our left, moving toward the airfield, had run into light resistance. But it was evident the Japanese on Guadalcanal

had pulled back to size up the situation. Many Marines believed the Japanese thought we had come to hit and run; tear up as much as we could and get out. At the same time, we could not understand the ease with which we had entered the island and moved forward. Our squad had not seen the enemy, or heard him, on land.

We knew he was supposed to like to fight at night. Thus, we watched night fall with some foreboding. Strange woods, so to speak, can be confusing. A strange tropical coconut grove intertwined with jungle can be twice as confusing.

As night deepened, we were a tiny group surrounded by whispering palms, the rumble of the ocean and strange noises. Unlike American forests, tropical woodlands, marshes, and groves are filled with noise. Instead of the soothing chirrup of crickets, the bass *brumph-brumph* of bullfrogs, the hum of an occasional mosquito and the mating call of the moose, there is a bedlam of strange noises, some of which have to be heard to be believed.

There is a jungle bird, identified by Marine bird watchers as the cockatoo, which comes to life at night. The cockatoo is a kind of parrot; a colorful creature inclined to be vain, but endowed with poor eyesight and weak kidneys. Fussy about his roost, it takes the cockatoo most of the early evening to select a place to sleep. Once settled, there is silence for a time, then he has to get up and flies to the bathroom, wherever it is.

The commotion this creates is beyond description. He wakes up his mate. She cries out in hysteria and falls off the perch with wing flapping, branch shaking, and palm-frond banging that would awaken the dead. Meanwhile, old dad has flown, yelling and screaming as he feels his way through the trees, crashing into fronds, hitting bushes, and beating his wings in the underbrush.

He gets settled, finally, and with the exception of an occasional strained cry, he is quiet for a brief period. Then, he crashes his way back to his roost, hitting trees, falling as his wings beat desperately in the night, squawking and screaming, struggling and talking in a loud voice until he, at long last, reaches home.

His arrival, accompanied by threshing tree branches and wild screams, awakens his faithful wife, who, evidently, fights with him in the manner of fishwives. This domestic scene shatters the warm darkness with more squawks, wing flutterings, foot shufflings, and near falls. Until, at long last, everyone is settled and the arrogant voices stilled. But this state of peace, this blessed quiet, is only a temporary lull. Soon a neighboring cockatoo begins to stir. And he repeats the complex process of departure and return in a different sector of the jungle.

During interludes between these lofty encores of the cockatoo, coconuts fall to earth. A coconut in its husk, which is a thick shell of woody fiber surrounding the brittle nut itself, weighs ten or more pounds. These oblong missiles grow at the very top of the coconut palm, nestled among the fronds. They are solid and heavy enough to kill a man unprotected by a steel helmet, should he be struck on the head. Operating under laws of chance, they release themselves and plunge to the ground, crashing with a healthy thud. But when they strike a truck hood, the sound is more impressive and similar to that obtained by attacking a washtub with a mallet.

These random sounds are accompanied by a background of hums, throbs, crunches, buzzes and thumps, rustles, snaps and squeaks of a thousand other things. As one lies on a thin poncho and blanket in a foxhole, ear to the ground in an effort to detect enemy movement, there comes a scratching-chewing-filing sound that slowly grows louder. It is so fascinating, it bolts out thought of all other sounds. The hesitant, but at the same time dedicated, noise slowly grows a little louder and a little nearer. It closely resembles tunneling operations with a hacksaw blade, or the chewing of pecans, shell and all. This is the hearty land crab crunching away beneath the sand. If there is anything that will prevent sleep without fail, it is a hungry land crab beneath a blanket.

These noises were new to us. Because of them, we could not sleep, suspecting each new sound to be the enemy come to cut our throats. As we lay there in the dampness of predawn hours, a lone jeep motor shattered the song of Nature. Strange in

the context of the island, the little car moved with brassy mechanical sounds, without lights, and some distance from us. We listened to it, wondering who was crazy enough to be driving through the night in such a carefree way. As we listened, a cry broke through the din of the engine.

*"Halt . . . !"* shouted a deeply Southern voice. *"Haw—llllttt!"*

The jeep rattled onward, its speed unchanged.

*"Haw—lllltttt, damn youuuu . . . givvvv the passsssword!"*

The vehicle continued without checking speed.

*Ker—pow—eeeeee . . .* went a rifle. *Therrrrwing . . .* went the ricochet of a bullet.

The jeep slowed in the darkness; the roar of its motor softened.

*"Hallelujah, bro—ther . . . Hal—le—luuu—jaaah . . ."* came the voice of a Tennessean from the jeep; a voice filled with all the fervor of a camp-meeting testimonial.

The motor again picked up power, and the little vehicle sped away.

"Hallelujah" was the password. The Japanese cannot pronounce "L" with any degree of success.

The rifle did not speak again. The noise of the little combat car faded into silence.

We laughed through our exhaustion. Laughed aloud. The sweet sound of laughter rippled among us, broken by quiet "goddamns."

The night consumed itself, became the dawn, and was the second day.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Death and Vulgarly

Now our bodies had been deposited in the sand as if from a strange world and we awakened in a vague, dreamlike place unknown to our heritage. It was not of us, this world, this island, this dripping jungle. We were seed brought by the wind and the rain from far away to be cast abroad as wheat is cast upon rich loam by gaunt hands in hope some will survive to push their way through earth toward life as it is to be tomorrow.

We were scattered among the trees at random. We were anchored to the thin surf of the sea that had borne us, anchored there to twine as a narrow, feeble line through palm rows and brush into the shallow interior, across flats and meadows to root against ridges and hillocks. Our line was as light and shadowy as a cobweb strand without thickness, yet frightfully strong for its dimension and length, and filled with a stickiness, a resilience, that gave it power beyond its weight. We were a delicate web woven of life and cast from tree to tree, from brush to vine to hillock, full of sags, dips, and twists, but thrust into the void

of this place as a snare. We were a lure to dangle in the face of the enemy. And a noose. A noose set for him to be applied to him and to strangle him here, on this plain and under these gaunt trees and in this place—this battlefield. Here we would test him, and he us. Here Victory would embrace one, and Death, many. We had chosen this place to answer, for we must choose some place; we must answer. Just as the Japanese had chosen Pearl Harbor to speak, for they, too, had felt they must choose some place. And they had chosen it. They had spoken. We had decided to fight here; to begin here. This was our first choice of a battlefield in this war. The enemy had selected the others. Now we had come here. We had planted ourselves here. We stood not as defenders under the lash of an aggressor, but as defenders who had entered the house of the scornful—a house he had stolen from a friend—with the intention of driving him from it that our own house might be safe. Thus, the conflict had been joined at Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal stood before the doors of history. We had opened those doors. We had entered them. Now chance was at the helm. Having been committed, we were no longer in absolute control of our days and nights, or of our lives. We were now expendable. Barter of war. Professionals in arms. Marines were now practicing their trade.

We were led by Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, USMC, a soft-spoken native of Virginia who had been commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marines in 1909. Because of his gentle manner of speaking, General Vandegrift had been nicknamed “Sunny Jim” by the late Major General Smedley D. Butler, under whom he had served for many years.

General Vandegrift had known the Japanese in Shanghai in 1927. As executive officer assigned to the American Embassy at Peking in 1935–36, he had predicted the United States and Japan would eventually find themselves in conflict.

General Vandegrift had been under fire in Nicaragua in 1912, and he took part in the occupation of Vera Cruz in 1914. He fought against “soldier bandits” in Haiti in 1915. Utterly without fear, the general never doubted the capabilities of his Marines,



and, in turn, the Marines of the First Division never doubted the firm courage and judgment of this general. It was these factors that played a major part in the conquest of the Solomons.

Unloading operations continued on the beach August 8. Our transports reappeared at daylight. Landing craft busily moved back and forth from ship to shore with more Marines and cargo.

Meanwhile, we moved through the coconut grove as units to our left pushed through heavier growth toward the main Japanese camp and the airstrip. By afternoon, that assault group had taken those enemy installations. The news of this achievement passed swiftly by word of mouth, and we all felt we were now in solid.

During the day, the Japanese sent torpedo planes in an effort to sink our vessels. They had failed the first day; now they tried again. But a coastwatcher warned our Navy of the approaching planes, and the ships were ready for the aerial attack.

Coastwatchers, Australians and New Zealanders, operated hidden radios on the coasts of the Bismarcks and Solomons. Assisted by natives, they gave warning of Japanese movement in the area, watched for ship concentrations, flights of planes, landing operations, and other such matters of interest and military value. There was a coastwatcher on Guadalcanal, high in the interior mountains, and he was of great help in the months ahead.

When the Japanese planes struck, concentrated antiaircraft fire of more than fifty ships, plus attacks of our Navy planes based on the carriers, almost wiped them out. The few that escaped returned to their bases without having caused serious damage to our shipping. As in the first air raid, they had ignored the beach to hit our vessels in the channel. However, they did accomplish one important success by their attack. They delayed the unloading operation. During the air raid, the ships had to suspend work, get under way, and fight enemy planes. By the time things could settle back down and get organized once again, precious hours had been lost. This was time we could ill afford. By late afternoon, some transports were only twenty-five per cent

unloaded. Although in combat-loaded ships the important items, such as water, ammunition, guns, and landing rations, are on top of the heap and are removed first, everything is needed right down to the bottom of the cargo holes.

If everything could be unloaded, we would have supplies designed to sustain us for sixty days. Ninety days of supplies were considered normal for an operation of this type, but technical considerations had reduced this to the sixty-day quantity. So, we were short of supplies, in a sense, even if we got everything ashore.

Information was received by the Navy from Australia that a Japanese force had been seen during the morning heading toward the Solomons. This information was not received at Guadalcanal until very late afternoon. Our squad did not hear any rumor of the approaching enemy force as we settled down in the coconut grove for the second night. Ordinarily, such bad news is quickly received by troops on the battle line. But we did not hear of it on this occasion.

During early evening, a tropical drizzle began to fall. We wrapped ourselves in ponchos in an effort to keep as dry as we could. But ponchos aren't as effective as they should be. We slowly became wetter and wetter. The rain would stop occasionally, then start up again. For a while, sleep was impossible. But, finally, I managed to fall asleep, a blessing due to exhaustion. None of us had slept much since the afternoon of August 6, catching catnaps at odd moments.

We took turns on watch. One man in the squad would sit with an automatic weapon and guard the rest of us on a four-hour shift basis.

Several hours before dawn on August 9, Trenton shook me awake.

"Something is goin' on out on the ocean," he whispered. "You awake?"

I grunted, too tired to move.

"Looks like all hell has broke loose," Bellflower added.

Somehow, the thought occurred to my sleep-drenched mind if Bellflower was awake, something *must* be going on. I heard

what sounded like distant thunder. With great effort, I got up and fought my eyes open.

I looked toward the ocean. We were back from the beach about a hundred feet and only a few inches above sea level. The rumbling continued, deep, kettledrum-like sounds and flashes of light. Instantly, it came to my mind: This is a naval battle.

"I bet you it's a damn fight out there," Trenton said. "Look over there . . . over to the left, there."

I looked. The flashes were close-in, near Savo Island. Flashes like summer lightning were coming from many points. The sound rolled in seconds later. It was a strange sensation to watch in the darkness, wet and cold, and see these bursts of light, sometimes from one source, sometimes from several places at once, all scattered toward the horizon. The firing was in drumlike rolls with intervals of rapid beats alternated by single broadsides of fire. It was clear to us from the flashes, the ships were in rapid motion. The light would flower in great bursts in one spot, then would repeat at a new and different point at sea.

As the conflict continued, there were great and sudden bursts of huge red, cloudlike displays of glowing puffs that changed to a mixture of white, crimson, bluish, and blood-red mixtures before suddenly reducing themselves to smaller embers of color. We were positive such awesome flowerings marked the direct hit and sinking of an enemy vessel. The pyrotechnics were massive, even at the distance we viewed them. They came as cheering signs to us as we crouched in our foxholes, front-line troops witnessing a battle at sea. This, I think, was one of the few times in modern history a great naval battle had been witnessed by troops engaged in conflict on land.

We came to hope desperately for more evidence of sinking ships. We were now convinced beyond any doubt our warships were driving the enemy from the ocean. We knew the Japanese had been trapped by our Navy and were now being destroyed.

The great rumbling continued. Now much closer inshore and to our left as we looked toward the sea. Suddenly, there was a massive burst of crimson flecked with white that rose upward, expanding all the while and boiling as clouds do in a storm. We

could hear explosions, faint and different in tone from the rumbles, as the fires leapt to great heights as a semicircular ball, intensely red in the center, then reduced itself in volume and soon disappeared.

"We got that one!" Trenton said excitedly. "That was a hit and the thing blew up. Boy, wasn't that a sight. It must have been a battleship, or something like that."

All of us were filled with excitement. We were like spectators in the days of Rome, turning our thumbs down, thirsty for the blood of gladiators in the arena. We called for blood. There was a feeling of exhilaration. We forgot our wet clothing and the dripping of the rain, which now had become a series of large drops.

As we watched, the battle seemed to drift farther away, slowly, with fainter and fainter rumblings that followed fewer and fewer flashes of light, it faded and was gone. The sea was dark and quiet again.

"We'll know tomorrow what happened," I said. "I'm anxious to know how many we sank."

Trenton yawned. "Me, too. That makes it a little better around here. You know, makes it safer, and we can get unloaded."

"Uh-huh," I said.

Victory was sweet to us that night. We wrapped up again. Daylight was not far away.

At dawn we were up, and after washing our faces in the sea, we ate a breakfast of pineapple slices and coconut. In a foxhole, we built a fire with paraffin-coated tubes in which our 37-mm shells were packed. These waterproof containers made excellent fuel that burned with a smokeless flame, a matter of some importance in concealment. Such a fire heated water in our canteen cups quickly. To this we added a brown powder which dissolved reluctantly to make a bitter liquid identified by Headquarters, Marine Corps, as coffee. Though this wasn't the best coffee known to mankind, it was brown and hot. The desire for hot coffee is a passion with Marines. I usually drank three cups at breakfast. These were canteen cups, and they totaled

three pints. At the other two meals, I drank two cups, for a total of four more cups—or seven pints of coffee a day.

Coffee at breakfast is a boost to morale in battle. It is usually all there is, and without this simple beginning for the day, the world seems to get off on the wrong foot. Cigarettes don't taste as good, and there is a gnawing feeling something is missing. And, of course, what is missing is the coffee. A steaming canteen cup of coffee warms the bones after a night of damp cold.

Not long after coffee, we were ordered to work our way over to the airstrip. We hooked the cannon to our truck, hopped in, and bumped over a winding trail leading inland. The distance was not great, and within a few minutes we were in the middle of civilization as it was known on Guadalcanal. The airstrip area looked more urban than anything we had seen since our arrival. There were some frame structures; a few of these were rather large. Rambling, and low, they resembled oversized chicken houses. We crossed Lunga River, a shallow, rapid stream with a rocky bottom, commented upon the Japanese privies standing on stilts over the water, and approached the airfield.

Shellfire from our warships and bombs from Navy planes had caused some destruction, but all was not lost. The field itself didn't look too bad, though the runway was still rough and pocked with a few scattered craters. A Seabee unit was with us, and these professional construction men were to go to work on the field and other necessary construction as soon as possible. Now that we had it, it was vital the landing area be readied for our own planes.

Lieutenant Rose ordered the guns—there were three others in our unit—to set up across the width of the west end of the field and for us to dig in around them. This we did, stringing the cannon across the clearing, pointing them toward the end of the runway with the length of the field behind us. A tall grass, something like sagebrush, grew in this flat, cleared area. My gun was on the left side of the field, with the others in line to my right. Considerable distance separated us, but we could command the area to our front very easily. We dug the guns in, set them for immediate action, and threw nets over them. Into

the nets we stuck the sagebrush, and the effect was very good, we thought, as the guns blended with the terrain.

To our left, was a small knoll covered with trees. It rose sharply from the field with a steep slope that was clear of underbrush. After we got our gun position set, Trenton and I made for the knoll to see how effective the camouflage was and to learn a little more about the terrain nearby. It is always something of a comfort to know before nightfall what lies near, what possible danger spots there are, whether or not other units are implaced, and landmarks of the immediate areas. It gives a certain advantage to know these things. It prevents confusion should there be a night attack. It prevents engaging your own units and it provides a mental map that becomes useful in the darkness. So, we made for the knoll. It was farther away than it appeared. As we walked we heard the throb of a plane. At first, we thought it was one of ours, and paid little attention. But as we looked up, we saw the Rising Sun—the Meatball—on its wings identifying it as Tojo-made. With that, we broke into a race for cover, making the hill in a matter of seconds. The plane seemed little interested in us after all, and we felt a little foolish. It flew in lazy circles, evidently on a mission of reconnaissance. The Jap pilot was fairly high, but not extremely so, and appeared to be interested chiefly in the airfield.

"Where are our fellows? Where are the good guys . . . could they still be at lunch?" Trenton asked.

I was still puffing from the sprint. I tried to catch my breath, looking up at our visitor. "Maybe they've gone home. Come to think of it, Trenton, I haven't seen the Navy in some time."

"Me, either."

We watched the Jap. He was rather arrogant, we thought. He just sailed about, his engine throbbing in the peculiar way the enemy engines had, taking his time.

"He must know our planes aren't around," Trenton said.

"If he doesn't, he's nuts," I agreed. "I wonder if he can see our gun out there."

"Can you?"

I looked for the first time since reaching the knoll. My full

attention had been on the plane. I couldn't see the little cannon. Just a field of sagebrush. It looked very natural, as they say at funerals.

"Nope," I answered him. "We finished in the nick of time. He can't see the thing, even with his glasses on."

Trenton tilted back his helmet. The straps dangled. "He isn't goin' to do a damn thing. He's just lookin'."

We watched in silence. The Jap pilot was making oval passes from one end of the field to the other.

"Takin' pictures, you think?" I asked, watching the slow circles.

"Sure. They are tryin' to find out what hit 'em."

I lighted a cigarette. It was a Jap brand. All of us had run out of American brands. We had found these at a Jap dump and had loaded up with them.

Trenton took one, lighted it and blew out smoke, his eyes watering.

"Jesus," he moaned, "these are awful." He inhaled and coughed. "I think these things are dope . . . or manure."

"Can't you tell the difference?"

"If it's dope, it's cheap dope," he added. "But just think about it for a minute, now. Why, they could wreck this operation by getting us mad for these things. . . ."

"That'll never happen," I said. "You just said they are awful."

"Uh-huh, but they could have poppy leaves in 'em . . . or opium roots." He removed the cigarette and looked at it.

"Dried," I said.

"Dried?"

"Dried roots."

"Sure! They would dry 'em. . . . Look at that Jap! Look at him!"

The Japanese plane was lower and heading for our hill.

"He sees these cigarettes and crazed for dope, he's going to try to get one," I said.

The plane had begun to circle short of our hiding place.

"I wouldn't put it past 'em . . . doping cigarettes." He took another drag. "God, these are awful."

I smoked my cigarette. The taste was dry and bitter. The smoke burned throat and nostrils.

"Nobody has shot at him. You noticed that?" Trenton asked.

"No use givin' away the gun positions. That's what he wants. He can't see anything he doesn't know already, anyway."

I nodded.

The plane continued to circle, gaining altitude. Finally, it droned off in the distance.

As it was growing dark, the major arrived with the captain and several other officers. He called all of us together at the edge of the airfield. His mustache tips were waxed. They stood out from his cheeks and pointed heavenward. He appeared distracted and waited impatiently for us to gather. Some of the men were at the guns. They had to be called in and one man left to keep an eye on things. This took a little time; not much, but some. The major appeared anxious to get on with the matter that had brought him.

"Now, men," he began without preliminaries, "we are in something of a spot. There may be a counterattack tonight, and if there is, you are to hold. If the Japs do attack, they will try to take this field. They will not succeed."

We were gathered in a little circle about him. He wasn't talking loud, as the enemy might be listening. I felt discouraged. News of an expected enemy attack tends to dampen the joy of battle. It is a defensive attitude. But there is always a possibility; when the possibility gets very good, then there is a special conference about it.

"We are in a serious position," the major continued. "The naval battle early this morning caused serious losses on our side. . . ."

Lord, we lost the damn thing! I thought with a cold chill. Those must have been our ships sinking . . . not Japs. My spirits became wringing wet.

The major cleared his throat. "The Navy has withdrawn and the carriers have gone. We have no air support, and will have none until we can get this airfield in shape. That may be several days. . . ."



My spirits were now wading, knee deep, in gloom. The size of it was: We had gotten hell beat out of us at sea. Now here we were with no sea or air support, standing on an airfield we couldn't use.

The major continued: "Conserve ammunition. We may need all we have and more. Don't waste any. Don't fire unless you are engaged . . . None of this insurance firing . . . Go easy with your food supplies . . . Watch the water supply . . ." He paused.

The little knot of men shuffled. No one said a word. The news was rather shocking. We had thought the whole thing had been easy. Too easy, it was turning out. Hell, it was just beginning. In fact, it hadn't really begun.

"What about the transports?" one of the men said.

"They are going to be here in the morning, and we are going to get off all we can . . . everything we can. Then they will pull out. They can't stay long with no protection, except those old destroyers."

There was a murmur of low comment in the group. Little whisperings and sighs.

"Are they coming back, sir?"

"Oh, yes," the major said. "It is not certain just what day. It will be several days, several days. The destroyers may come in and out . . ."

Hell, I thought, we've lost control of the water. We are cut off and have just about been treed. That's probably why that Jap plane was so calm and collected today.

The major emphasized again to be on one-hundred per cent alert. "The situation is serious, very serious . . . but there is one good thing, one ray of light . . ." He hesitated, then went on in a low, soft tone, "The Navy at Pearl Harbor has broken the Japanese Naval code. We are intercepting their orders and translating them. You must not discuss this. But you should feel better. We still have an ace up our sleeve . . ."

This was an interesting bit of news. Hell, why didn't they know about the situation last night? We should have beaten

them, if we were doing all this. But, then our ships did know the enemy was on his way. They knew that, evidently.

"How many ships did we lose, Major?" someone asked. "How many were lost in that battle?"

"I can't say . . . but it was serious. We didn't win it. They won. The situation is now acute. But I can't say how many. I don't think they are at all sure about it. . . ."

This was quite a let-down from our false beliefs of early morning as we watched the crimson flashes and heard the rolling thunder of broadsides. Those had been our men sinking, being blown up, burning and lighting the night sky for miles around. We had cheered it in our hearts . . . we had wanted more. It had never occurred to us we could lose. That we could be beaten in a battle. Beaten again and again, from the very first day. Well, there had been exceptions; but they had been rare, these exceptions. The United States had been fighting brave defeats. Now here we were. What would be the outcome here? Would it be another defeat? More of the same? Would we be wiped out? Forced out? Or starved out in a blockade?

The major was beginning to move off. The group broke up. It was night. The moon was still down. The field was pretty dark. Trenton and I stumbled through the sagebrush. The rest of the squad moved along with us. We found our position. In the dark we located the foxholes. I got the squad together. We sat in the darkness by the gun.

"You guys be ready all night. Stay in your foxholes. Two of us will be on watch all the time. The rest of you can doze. If something cuts loose, I'll wake you with this cannon. When it goes off, do your jobs like we have always done it. No smoking. No noise. No talking above a whisper. If you hear anything, let me know and we'll try to figure it out. Get settled and stay settled. Bellflower stay awake as much as you can."

We put a round of canister in the cannon and left the breech open. We got out some hand grenades and a couple of flare grenades.

"If I had known this sooner, we could have set up a trip wire for one of these flare grenades out front," I told Trenton.

"Too dark now," he said.

I agreed.

This was a good squad. We didn't have a full complement, but we had good men. Besides Bellflower, who was ammunition man; there was Gleason, the gunner; Maywell, loader; Thompkins, truck driver and machine gunner for the .50-caliber mounted on the truck; Flint, who was a young kid, rifleman and ammunition carrier; Trenton, who drove the jeep, carried messages and helped Lieutenant Rose locate gun positions ahead, which we later occupied, and myself. This was barely enough men to operate the weapons. About half as many as we should have had. Sometimes the lieutenant stayed with us, but usually he was with the platoon sergeant, who was with another gun.

It was a long night. The usual jungle sounds, with the exception of falling coconuts, which we had come to recognize, permeated the darkness. We were still too new on the island to be positive of our identification of complex noises, weird cries, and commotions. We knew, too, the Japanese were not above imitating such sounds. Sleep under such a situation was impossible. All sounds were danger signals. We tried to penetrate the night with our eyes. Quickly we learned we could see anyone walking, or crouching, by taking a low-level view. This put anything not flat on the ground in relief against the starlight. From this observation, we developed the technique of lying on our backs in a foxhole with our feet toward the enemy. Such a posture enabled one to see anything coming, even if there were no moon, and to fire without exposing one's body. It also prevented the Japs from stabbing one in the back. This way, you got stabbed in the chest. Nevertheless, it was a posture that allowed faster action—more rapid change from resting to fighting stance—than lying on the side or stomach. When in this position, you didn't have to pop your head up from the hole, like a turkey behind a log, to find out what was going on within a reasonable distance from the foxhole.

On this day in the United States, Washington issued a terse announcement of military action in the Solomons. At hindsight, Navy Communique 101 has a certain cautious quality of wording

and tone that is of interest today, when so many news items issue from government.

As reported by the Associated Press, the Navy said:

North and South Pacific areas.

1. United States Naval and other forces have attacked enemy installations in the southeast part of the Solomon Islands in force and the attacks continue.
2. Simultaneously, United States Naval forces bombarded enemy ships and shore establishments at Kiska.
3. No additional information is available at the present.

The Associated Press story added:

The Solomon Islands are located between the New Hebrides and the Bismarck Archipelago, extending over an area 600 miles long in a northwest-southwest direction and up to 100 miles wide.

Just what islands in the group were attacked, a Navy official said, is not known in Washington.

The Solomons last were mentioned in the South Pacific campaign on June 12 when the Navy told the story of the Battle of the Coral Sea.

It was not until August 10, 1942, that the Navy revealed landings had been made in the Solomons. This announcement, of course, was after the major defeat at sea we had witnessed from shore—one of the worst ever suffered by the United States Navy. In it, the Australian cruiser, *Canberra*, was sunk, and the American cruisers *Vincennes*, *Chicago*, *Astoria*, and *Quincy* were also destroyed.

In this news item of August 10, *International News Service* reported:

Admiral Ernest J. King today announced that United Nations forces have made landings against the Japanese in the Solomons.

The landings were made at a cost of one U.S. cruiser sunk, two cruisers, two destroyers and one transport damaged.

The "United Nations forces," of course had no reference to the United Nations of today, which did not exist at that time. The losses cited were August 7, 1942, losses, not those of

the night naval battle. The "transport damaged" was the *Elliott*, which had long since burned as the result of an enemy plane crashing aboard, and had been beached.

It is interesting to note here again, as in the earlier release of August 8, no mention was made of units involved in the land assault.

The Japanese, of course, did not yet know our purpose in the Solomons. The identification of the First Marine Division at the outset would have served no good purpose, and, quite possibly could have done us considerable harm.

We knew nothing of these news items. We received no news of any kind. Our newspaper was rumor. Our facts were speculations. As far as we were concerned, the people of the United States didn't know where we were, and, possibly, cared less. For some reason, it was a matter of little importance at the time whether they knew of our activities or not. We had not had the leisure to wonder about it.

We did have some news they didn't have back home. We knew we were in a spot. We knew we had suffered a serious blow at sea. We knew we almost had our backs against the wall, even before we had had a chance to set up housekeeping. This served to keep our minds occupied.

Dawn came. Nothing had happened. And we were worn out with it. Bone tired. Tension of past days began to be felt as a weight. The constant state of alert, the movement, excitement, physical work, eyestrain and tropical heat were burdens; indeed, shocks we had absorbed. Nature would remedy the situation. We would soon be so sleepy, we could sleep anytime, anywhere.

Battle creates a new order of living. It forms new blocks of time, erases the division between night and day, wipes out the meal hours, removes bedtime. The neat hours of an ordered civilian day are no longer in existence. Now the day is really twenty-four hours long with no discernible division between it and the day before, or the day following. Time is no longer morning, afternoon, or night; it is day or night. It is either daylight or darkness. Whether it is 8 A.M., or 11 A.M., or 3 P.M.,

means little; the important thing is that it is daylight. It is the same with the night, whose broad divisions are: getting dark, after dark, late, before daylight, and getting daylight. It's just as dark at 8 P.M. as it is at midnight, as far as night fighting may be concerned. The point is: It is either a long time to daylight, or it is almost daylight.

With the establishment of this new order of block time, the human machine is subjected to great and sudden change. There are no regular mealtimes. Food is eaten when available and when hunger is persistent enough to call itself to the attention of the mind. Hunger is always present, but in varying degrees. Thus, the stomach, intestines, kidneys, heart, lungs, legs, arms, feet, eyes, ears, and brain must adjust. Rhythms must change.

Fresh troops, new troops, cannot sleep. But as time wears on, as these troops become more and more adjusted to twenty-four-hour days, they become able to fall asleep instantly when the occasion presents itself.

Catnaps. Little slumbers. Dozes. These snatches of rest are taken in fits and starts, day and night, serving to keep all men going all the time—like the heartbeat, which rests briefly between pumps, but works day and night without stopping its vital function.

Such rest works out very well. No group of men sleeps at once; someone is awake all the time. By the same token, some are sleeping. If things are quiet, all are resting, some sleeping, some idle, some talking, some on watch; when the quiet is shattered by demands of war, all are in action.

As troops get more and more adjusted to block time, they can sleep through bombardments, air raids, small-arms fire—anything, provided the situation does not affect them directly and they are not needed, or provided they can do nothing about it—can neither fight back or leave, as in the case of naval bombardment or aerial attack by bombers.

We had not established this routine. We did not know of it. It was forced upon us by circumstance. It came without plan or schedule. It became a way of life, the way men lived, the normal order of things, an adjustment of Nature, for such

living is the wisdom of wild animals to whom life is war. Such animals live without knowledge of Time as civilization knows it, as men view it, for Time to beasts is the living instant without future or past. It is *now*. In this way we entered the kingdom of animals, fitted ourselves into Nature's pulsating movement of life without neat divisions, or smooth, polished, planned order. We were absorbed by our environment and the dangers we found in it.

As the sun appeared, a red mass that converted the heavy dew into steam and brought sweat rolling down our backs, Lieutenant Rose arrived, bubbling with activity. Trenton had barely finished his coffee. I was washing my face in my helmet in preparation for breakfast. The rest of the squad was stumbling about, engaged in similar activity. The officer was surging through the brush when we first saw him, freshly shaved, pink of cheek.

"Good morning, men!" he cried, surging up to the cannon and placing a foot on the trail.

Trenton and I saluted; he returned the greeting.

"I trust you had a pleasant night, sir," I said, water dripping from my face and hands. I dried them on my dungaree sleeves.

"Excellent," he grinned. "A room with a view."

Trenton remained silent. It was evident he was thinking of how nice a beer would have tasted for breakfast. His eyes were not adjusted and appeared as small pools of red.

"Corporal Trenton," Lieutenant Rose said, "man the jeep. We are to move to Lunga Point. We have to find it and look it over."

"Yes, sir," Trenton replied, bending over to pick up his sub-machine gun.

"Secure this position, Corporal Gallant," the lieutenant said. The two started to move toward the jeep, which was covered with sagebrush about thirty feet behind our position.

"Yes, sir," I said, turning to the squad. "So be it," I told them. "Wake Bellflower up."

Flint, fresh-faced and looking very much as if he were ready

to go to school, probed Bellflower with his boot. Bellflower was stretched on his back, mouth open, snoring softly.

"Hit the deck, Bellflower," Flint snorted, lifting Bellflower's leg and dropping it.

Bellflower opened his eyes. He looked even more vague than usual.

"Get up, Bellflower," I told him. "There's a war on. We are moving out to a better foxhole in the sky."

He yawned and got up. Sagebrush hung down from his helmet giving him the appearance of having dived through a bale of hay. He poured some water in his canteen cup and put the cup in the fire.

"Now that you've put on breakfast, let's get this gun secured while it's cookin'," I said.

We secured the gun, gathered up personal gear, made horse-shoe rolls and buckled up our packs.

I turned to Thompson. He was ready to go. "Get the truck and hook up this gun . . . get 'em off this open place. Put 'em over there in the edge of the trees and stay with 'em. Stick with the machine gun until we get over there with you. These guys can finish breakfast. When they get through, we'll all come over."

Thompson got the truck, hooked the gun up with our help, we loaded on our packs, and he drove off, bumping over the field. He pulled into cover. It looked good. I didn't want the thing blown up by a Jap plane.

At mid-morning Trenton and the lieutenant reappeared. We moved out, heading toward the beach in a westerly direction. The road wound like a cowpath. We passed some broken-down shacks and plunged into the coconut grove. The other guns were ahead of us. We were bringing up the rear. We came to a house that faced the sea and had a chicken-wire fence in the backyard. Our truck stopped.

"Corporal," the lieutenant shouted from the jeep, "set up in this area." He pointed toward the house. The jeep moved away through the trees.

"Pull on toward the beach," I told Thompson.



We moved ahead slowly. At the edge of the coconut grove, the beach dropped slightly. This was a gentle slope, shallow; not more than a foot or two. We stopped.

"Abandon ship," I said. We all got out. I looked around.

It was evident the U. S. Coast Guard was using the house. We could see some Guardsmen moving around inside. The building was a white frame structure of modest size with a front porch. It was in good condition and looked like thousands of similar dwellings near railroad tracks in the States. The backyard, with its sagging chicken-wire fence was a jumble of coops, boxes, and piles of weathered lumber, scrap wood actually. There was a large iron kettle of the type used in the deep South to boil clothes in the old days when Negro women earned extra money by "taking in washing." There were rusty cans scattered about, the evidence of a hasty departure. But, evidently, our ships had not hit the place during the shelling.

At a corner of the fence nearest to us was a small structure, a tool shed of some kind with a door hanging open. It had been built recently and didn't look completely finished. It was clean inside, though in disorder. The floor was covered with loose papers, some books, and torn pieces of equipment—part of a knapsack, a cloth belt, a dental mirror, note paper.

About ten feet from the shed was a large hole. It appeared the Japanese had been preparing to build a gun emplacement. The hole was fairly large, about four feet deep and maybe five feet square, but the sand at the corners had caved in, making the hole funnel-shaped. It had been covered with coconut logs, which were now scattered about; some of the logs had fallen in the hole, others had rolled to one side. There were several bundles of straw bags. Some of these were still tied together, other bundles had broken open and the sacks were loose. This was a light-colored straw; a bright tan reed of some sort woven into a container. They seemed pretty strong, and were new.

We started our gun position, locating it just in front of the coconut trees so we would have a clear field of fire toward the ocean and to the left and right, yet enjoy some protection of the palms. The frame house was to our right, and we were some

hundred feet from it. At the same time, the gun was not far distant from the Jap excavation, which we had decided to convert into an air-raid shelter, since most of the hard work had been done for us by the enemy. This thought made us feel quite good. We unhooked the gun and rolled it to the spot selected earlier, smoothed the sand around it, dug in the trail, and set to work filling the woven sacks with sand. We stacked these sandbags at each side of the gun as low walls.

The air-raid shelter was easy. We rolled the logs back on top, filled sandbags and stacked them four deep on top the logs and on all sides, except at an entrance we constructed on the landward side. We decided any shells would come from the sea, so we discarded convenience for safety. This work took until almost dark. But inspection of the shelter convinced us it had been worth the effort.

During late afternoon, a tank lighter beached near us and brought off two wounded found on a raft in the channel. They were survivors of the night battle at sea. We put them in our truck and a corpsman appeared from somewhere. We never did know how he got there.

One of the men was badly burned. He was just a boy, actually; not more than eighteen years old. His burned arms and face had been exposed to the water, the tropical sun, and the abuse of a wave-tossed raft. Long strips of burned skin, detached from the seared flesh by salt water, hung from him. His eyes were puffed and swollen almost shut and his shoulders were alternate patches of black and livid red meat.

The other sailor, who was a little older, was not burned so badly, but he was also in serious condition.

"Can't you give him something to stop the pain?" Thompson asked. He was in the driver's seat, ready to take the injured back to the airstrip, where the field hospital had been set up in one of the Jap buildings.

The corpsman, a middle-aged careerman with a pot belly, had a small piece of cotton in his hand. He was looking at the arms of the boy who was so badly burned. "I can't seem

to find a place that isn't burned," he said. "I think it would be better if I gave him the shot in an unburned area."

"Go on, give him something," I said. "He can't hurt any worse than he is now."

The boy was only semiconscious. He would try to open his eyes wider, but couldn't.

"Help me . . . oh, please . . . please . . . help me," he sobbed. His voice was very weak.

"We better get him back to the hospital," I said.

The corpsman gave the injection. The boy didn't seem to know anything had happened. He was muttering, but we couldn't understand him.

"Thompkins, go ahead," I said. "Drive easy, but get there as quick as you can."

He nodded and the truck moved away. The corpsman hopped in the back with Bellflower, who was riding shotgun.

Gleason, gunner on the 37-mm, turned to me. "God, that was awful," he said. Gleason was a quiet fellow, about twenty years old. He was from South Carolina. A small man with black hair and a large nose, he was a good gunner and liked by all of us. He kept pretty much to himself and was not much of a talker, though when he did say something he meant it.

The two sailors had upset me, too. I nodded agreement. "I hope that kid makes it; I hope he lives."

"I don't think he will . . . I don't think he'll live . . . I don't see how he can."

"I don't think so, either; but I hope he can . . . I hope he can live. He's such a young fellow," I said.

"Awful young to die like that," Gleason said.

"Burned up."

"And then on that raft all this time."

I shook my head. I wanted to put the sight from my mind. But I couldn't. I kept seeing that pitiful hand with long strings of burned skin hanging from the wrists and fingers, and the blood-red, raw flesh of the arms and face . . . and the skin hanging from his chin and neck. I wanted to put this out of my mind. I couldn't. The vision was too fresh, too clear.

"I wish we could have done something. You know. Could have helped some," I said.

"We don't even know who he was," Gleason said.

"I know it. Just saw him like that . . . and that was all," I said . . . "That other fellow will make it."

"I don't see how they made it," Gleason said, looking out toward the ocean. "All that time. I don't see how they found 'em."

"I hear they were looking out as far as Savo for survivors, you know, searching with the Higgins boats and tank lighters."

"Sharks got most of 'em, I guess," Gleason said. "They are awful bad in these waters . . . awful bad."

Our truck appeared through the trees. Thompkins didn't look happy. We gathered around the truck when it stopped by the toolshed.

"He didn't make it," Thompkins said.

"He didn't? What happened?" I asked.

"He died before we got halfway. Just died."

"I guess it was best," Gleason said. "Burned up like that. . . ."

"That other one . . . he's goin' to make, though," Bellflower announced.

"How do you know?" Gleason asked.

Bellflower, with a grin, jumped off the truck and took off his helmet. "Doc said so."

"Well, I'm glad of that . . . I'm glad of that," Gleason said.

"Better pick out where you're going to sleep and tell me where you'll be," I said. "Let's get all that settled before dark."

Trenton came up in the jeep, cut the motor and hopped out. "Supper ready?" He was grinning broadly. "I've brought the cocktails." He turned and reached in the back of the jeep, withdrew a blanket and unrolled it with much ceremony while we stood in a circle around him. "See!" he cried, waving two large bottles.

"What th' hell?"

"Saki, or gook brew," he laughed. "There are damn near two quarts of the stuff."

"What's it taste like?" I asked, astonished by the display, and somewhat weak, as I was both empty and dry.

"It is supposed to be good stuff, something like homebrew. They are giving a bottle to each squad and I found an extra one."

We examined the bottles.

"This is for after dinner. We'll have to spread a cloth and light candles and do this right," Trenton said.

"Guard the goods . . . and with your life," I said.

He put them in the air-raid shelter. "Say, that ain't bad," he observed as he came out.

"Nothing but the best around here," Thompkins laughed. "They dug a good hole."

We looked around the position and got the lay of the land while there was daylight.

"How far down the beach do our lines go?" I asked Trenton.

"Not far. The other three guns are on our left and they're about fifty yards apart . . . and there's a space, then the riflemen have a line inland. Not much behind us, either."

We were talking as we stood by the gun. Looking toward the water and toward the left, where the island curved out into the sea.

"Look at that," Trenton said. "That black thing there in the water." He pointed a little to the left of our gun.

I looked. There was a black, round object floating on the water. It appeared to be a small piece of wood.

"A piece of driftwood," I said. "Don't you think?"

"Well, it could be. But watch it and see if you still think that."

I watched it. It didn't bob up and down like a piece of wood does in the waves. "Maybe it's a post stuck in the water." It was out a couple hundred feet, but appeared close inshore.

"Somethin' funny about it." Trenton's voice carried a note of excitement. His eyes never left the black thing.

I looked. It just appeared the same. It stuck above the water about a foot.

"It's moving!" he cried.

I watched intently. *It was moving*, but very slowly. Since it stuck from the water like a post, it wasn't normal for it to move in such a position . . . not that high from the water.

"Why, the bastards," Trenton snorted, his eyes wide. "I got it . . . I know what the hell is wrong with that thing." He was about to burst with the excitement of his discovery. "You look now . . . !"

"Hell, I'm lookin'."

"Now, now . . . what's it doin'?"

"Movin'."

"Aw, crap! Which way? Which way is it goin'?"

"From left to right," I said, unable to get excited about a stick in the water.

"Right! An' which way is the current—the waves—which way is the flow? You just tell me, by God, now . . ."

"From right to left," I said in some excitement as it dawned on me the thing was drifting against the current; moving against the tide.

"That's a periscope," Trenton shouted, swinging to face me. "It's a gook sub . . . it ain't ours for sure!"

He was right. That's what it was. I had never seen one before, but now it was obvious to me. It was a periscope. A Japanese sub was slowly, silently checking the beach. Spying on us. Watching us with glittering eyes from the depths. I felt foolish. Here we were gawking into a periscope while the enemy must be filled with mirth as he watched from the other end. All the time we had been pointing and discussing the floating object they had been looking directly at us.

"I'll get a rifle and blast his glass," I said. "If he wants to poke it up, we can knock it off for him." We were unarmed. Everything but the cannon was back in the grove with the rest of the squad. But if I could get a rifle and get back without him suspecting me, I could hit him; it was an easy shot.

Trenton nodded. "Be careful. If he thinks we know what he is, he'll pull down under water."

I thought how silly all this was. Here was a whole tubful

of Japs, practically at our feet, and we were trying to play cat and mouse. I was going to try to blind him with a .30-caliber rifle bullet. He was going to down scope the minute he caught on.

"I'll try to ease back as if we don't know the score," I said.

The periscope was still moving slowly through the water, cutting little ripples as it slipped through the tiny waves. I turned and started walking toward the grove. Trenton watched the scope. I entered the trees and broke into a run, charged up to the truck, pulled off a rifle and thundered back. As I reached the edge of the trees, the scope disappeared.

"Damned!" Trenton bellowed. "He saw you . . . he saw that rifle."

"Cowardly bastard," I puffed as I trotted up to Trenton. "After all, he had a five-inch gun, maybe bigger."

"He didn't want to go home with a busted glass," Trenton grinned. "He'd of had to surface and put in a new one, or else be blind."

"Aw, they have a spare on the conning tower," I argued. "You know they wouldn't be that stupid. Not have a spare."

"Well, he got away, by damn!" Trenton growled.

"Yep," I said, then remembered the Jap brew. "This calls for saki time. We need a drink after all that."

Trenton's face lighted up; his pace increased. We went back to the squad and opened the saki, divided it among the canteen cups of good men and true, and hashed over our failure to outwit the sub. We ate pineapples from a gallon can. There was hardtack and coffee. We had coconut for dessert. It all tasted pretty good. Especially the saki. It had a warm glow, a friendly approach; it tasted like beer, only better and stronger.

We sat in a little circle, weapons by our sides, helmets on, sweat dripping from our chins. There was a feeling of trust and strength in this small group. A sense of comradeship and security of belonging. We watched the fire in the hole in the sand as smokeless flames licked the sides of our canteen cups. It was the coffee hour.

The sun was beginning to touch the sea. A dull-red giant of a sun glaring through a cloudless sky. It appeared twice

as large as back in the States. At this time of day, you could look at it as it sank with startling speed to be extinguished by the water far at sea. Night comes suddenly at this place and with forceful impact.

We covered the fire with sand. Darkness was now our cloak. To smoke, we had to take turns in the air-raid shelter, where no glow could be seen from outside. I divided up the watch. Flint, the young kid, was on first. This way he had company most of the time. Then Maywell, the loader, who was nervous at night. Then Bellflower and Gleason, and Thompkins and Trenton, and I took the last watch, plus the responsibility of checking on the other watches during the night. These watches consisted of staying awake, searching the beach and surf with glasses from our gun position, and insuring that strangers did not visit us during the night. It was a silent look and listen job. You stayed down, stayed quiet, and stayed alert. Anything suspicious meant waking me up. But there was no such thing as a night's sleep for anyone. Battle makes light sleepers.

I had dug an L-shaped foxhole along the chicken-wire fence line. This was what I considered a clever new foxhole design. There were few L-shaped foxholes in these early days, and I can safely say I was the originator of them. The length of the hole, which was quite shallow, was such that anyone wishing to get at me had to stick his head into the short end of the L. This put his neck in a convenient position for me to grab it and rip it open with a very keen hunting knife I had bought at Jacksonville. Before I had gotten the hunting knife, I had owned a hook knife used to butcher hogs, but it was stolen from me. It was too novel for anyone to resist. And it was not long in my possession. But the hunting knife that replaced this hook knife was adequate to any job, I felt, and I was proud of it. You cannot easily cut a throat with a bayonet; it was too dull. It is a stabbing weapon, anyway. So, most of us bought from our own funds various knives for emergencies, and for cooking. The bayonet was a can opener, and a good one.

Over this L-shaped architectural triumph, I had placed some sheet iron similar to the galvanized tin roofing that is so romantic



in a rainstorm, especially on honeymoons. This roof would offer about as much protection from gunfire as a window screen, but that was not the point. The purpose of the roof was to protect me from rain, which had fallen upon us with unfailing regularity for varying periods each night.

Into this hole, I placed my poncho and blanket, settled the roof, and, with much struggle, falling sand, and head bumping, managed to back inside. Once underground—or under roof to be more exact—I discovered the place was cozy beyond my wildest expectations. It was dry. It muffled jungle noises. With my ear on the ground, I could detect footsteps at some distance. There was a feeling of security a nesting bullfinch must know, or a gopher in his hole. If necessary, I could spring erect, sheet iron falling to one side, or lie quietly to ambush unsuspecting Japs bent on bayonet drill. My blind side was protected by the sagging chicken-wire fence. It was a perfect place. I thought of writing Headquarters, Marine Corps, and suggesting they include the design in training manuals to replace the common straight foxhole, the spider hole, the shellhole and the zigzag trench. I was positive no creature could find me unless by accident.

By inching forward slightly, I could see the sky over my exit. In this way, I could detect the approach of an intruder. Should he put his head in the opening, I could nab him around the neck and pull his head underground, there to slit his throat while the rest of him threshed helplessly outside. He could not even hit me with a rifle bullet, if he should fire straight into the entrance. I thought about hand grenades. But, then, I could spring upward and the grenade would go off harmlessly in the crater I had just left.

I drifted into sleep.

It seemed I had been napping for only a few minutes when I was awakened by footsteps. Not fully alert, my mind focused in a blurred way on the sounds. The noises were disorganized. They seemed to be made by heedless running, stumbling, and falling. I moved into position to drag anyone who came close into the foxhole and cut his throat. My hunting knife in my

hand, I waited. I was very calm, a state of being that surprised me considerably. I waited, quietly, trying to fathom what was going on. It is best to find out what the action is before revealing your position. This is a rule that has saved many lives. I waited, looking down the short end of the L and upward toward the sky. Anything near me would block out the sky. The movement was confused. It reflected either panic or total disregard for personal injury. It seemed to be whirling around the air-raid shelter.

Almost without warning the noise was at the entrance to my advanced L-shaped foxhole. The starlight suddenly was blacked out. The space between the earth and the roof over it was filled with heavy breathing, grunts, and unintelligible speech gasped out between puffs and moans.

This is it, I thought.

I reached out with my arm and clamped a human neck in its vise and anchored it by plunging my clamped fist to the soft earth. The result was as I had imagined it. The victim was completely helpless. His face was pressing into the earth. His neck was hung in my arm like a little boy's between pickets in a fence. Outside, his arms and feet pounded and threshed helplessly. He could do nothing. I had him on the hook ready for the knife. I tightened my grip on the hunting knife and shifted slightly so when I tilted his head back with my arm I could do an effective job of surgery across his throat.

It was evident that whoever I had caught in my trap was fighting for his life. His flops and tugs pulled at my arm much as a fish jerks the line. The fellow kept making noises with his mouth but they were muffled. Nevertheless, they struck me as being unlike Japanese, as spoken by a native, would sound.

"I am going to kill you, you son-of-a-bitch," I informed the gurgling specimen and raised my new hunting knife to his throat. I knew I would have to make the stroke swiftly then jump upward through my metal roof, else I would be sprayed with hot blood. I had no desire to have fresh blood squirted in my face or splattered all over my dungarees, as I had only two pairs, one of which I was wearing.

I lifted the unknown head, which I now fully intended to sever from its anchorage, and bent it backward to expose the throat and tighten the muscles and skin for a smooth sweep of the knife. It was dark as pitch in the foxhole, a disadvantage of the roof; in fact this was the only defect I had discovered in my design.

As I lifted the head from where I had originally clamped it, removing the now violently flopping body's face from the sand into which I had pressed it with the force of a man who thought he was fighting for his life, the words, "Please don't kill me," penetrated my consciousness.

Great God, he speaks English as good as I do, I thought. Then, I said to him, "I'm goin' to cut your damned throat."

"Oh, God!" he cried. "Please don't, it's me, Private Maywell."

I was stunned. "Who?" I bellowed.

"Maywell . . . Maywell . . . Please don't kill me, please don't."

I must be crazy, I thought. But, then, it *did* sound very much like Maywell.

"Back out slowly," I said. "And I won't kill you until I can see you better. But go slow."

He was frozen with fear. He backed out slowly. I held onto his neck and crawled slowly along with him. We got out of the L-shaped foxhole.

The starlight was very bright. I looked into the face of Maywell. "You crazy bastard," I growled. "What's the matter with you? I could have killed you . . . And who the hell would have been loader?"

"I got scared," he said. "I thought I heard something and I couldn't find your foxhole."

"The devil you couldn't," I said.

I felt a surge of pity and shame for Maywell. Poor guy. He had guts enough to admit he was scared. I was scared, too. The night was very lonely on Guadalcanal, and strange.

"We'll stay up together," I said. "You have ruined my damned night."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I know I did."

"But you proved I was right about the L-shaped foxhole—you can't beat it."

"Uh-huh," he said without enthusiasm.

I looked around in the night. Everybody was asleep. The Japs, evidently, could drive a herd of elephants through our squad and not disturb them.

Maywell and I went out to the gun position. I checked the sea with the binoculars. It was empty. We settled down on watch. The water whispered across the sand and the wind played among the palms. Somewhere behind us a Jap machine gun sputtered and paused. A Marine weapon coughed in reply. We sat in silence each comforted by the other's presence; tired, but attentive to every sound.

"This ain't too bad a place," Maywell whispered.

"No, I guess not . . . better than nothin'," I said.

We listened to the night and looked at the jeweled heavens. In the distance Savo Island was a dusky hump. The Coast Guard house was silent. Down the beach, the sand seemed to have a dull, white glow.

Isn't this silly, I thought to myself. Silly as the very devil.

A cockatoo began to stir. We knew what that meant.

"We better keep a lookout on that cockatoo, it may be a Jap," I said.

Maywell nodded.

We sat in the sand and listened. Listened to the cockatoo. And watched the sea, the endless rolling sea.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### Blood for Eleanor

The Japanese submarine appeared to the right of Savo Island about 10:00 A.M. and cruised across our front, circled, and moved smoothly through the water in the opposite direction about a mile offshore. Its conning tower caught the sun's rays and the deck guns were clearly visible to us from the beach. The vessel was in no hurry. It moved, snakelike, in the calm waters parallel with the beach and toward the Tenaru River, altered course and headed out to sea, then reversed itself and repeated its steady pacing back and forth across our front.

It must have been the same sub that had watched us. At least, we chose to believe it was. Now he had become bold, showing himself in the dazzling sun and under a sky of deep, powder-blue flecked with high specks of clouds, white, puffy pillows of moisture widely scattered toward the horizon.

We watched fascinated. As we looked, the deck gun of the sub fired toward our island; its thunder following the yellow flash of the muzzle by several seconds. The shell crashed into Guadalcanal to our right a considerable distance away. He was shooting at the airport. There was a pause while the Nips re-

loaded. The weapon fired again. The rumble was in the same area.

"Let's shoot back at him!" Gleason, the gunner, said to me.

I thought about it. It was frustrating. I doubted if we could hit him; judgment of distance is difficult over water. If we did hit him, I doubted if our shell would do any more damage than a hand grenade. At that distance, the shell, if it got there, would be moving no faster than a baseball. On the other hand, we might hit something. Who could tell? A lucky shot might drop down his hatch, or hit a pile of shells on the deck.

"Why not?" I said. "Let's try a half-dozen rounds."

The squad was filled with glee. They got busy. The little 37-mm was swinging on the target in a matter of seconds.

"Give a pretty good lead and let him have it," I said.

Gleason peered into the sight, hit the button and the little cannon snorted and bounded into the air. The crew reloaded and fired again. I tried to spot the splashes, or hits, or anything—but I could tell nothing. The distance was so great for such a small shell even if it had hit the side of the sub, I doubted if I could have seen the flash in the glare of the sun-drenched ocean.

The crew fired several more rounds. The sub ceased firing. It was almost even with our gun position. Down the beach to our right, it sounded like the half-tracks were shooting, too. They had larger weapons. Maybe it was a tank firing. The sub slid onward, moving dead slow. Its deck gun roared. This time we heard the sigh of the shell, a *swish-swish-swishing* sound. It landed about a hundred yards to our right. We could hear the rain of shrapnel among the coconut trees.

The squad got off two or three more rounds. The sub replied; the dirty-yellow smoke of its gun quite distinct now. The Jap gun crew, obviously, could see our muzzle blast, for this enemy shell crashed just the other side of the Coast Guard house, landing next to the backyard of that dwelling. The smoke of its explosion was carried in our direction by a gentle breeze. The racket of its discharge was sharp and loud. The hum of flying metal quite clear.

"Fire two more quick ones and secure!" I shouted.

The crew obeyed. Two shots in close succession. I still could not spot where our shells were falling. It just didn't seem possible. We must have been overshooting and hitting on the far side of the sub, though this seemed unlikely. At any rate, the Japs knew we were talking back. They fired another round. This time the shell was moaning quite intimately. It crashed to earth and exploded in the backyard of the Coast Guard house, sending pieces of chicken coop and scrap wood flying.

"He's about to get our name and address," I shouted. "Head for the air-raid shelter!"

We took off and covered the distance in a matter of seconds. We all got inside. The place was just the right size. Plenty big. It had a secure feeling. We heard the sub fire again. The shell was high. It passed over us and landed well inland. There was another and another, but each was farther down the beach and inland. He couldn't hurt anybody that way.

We got out of the hole. Everyone was stimulated by the contact with the Japanese Navy, no matter how remote it had been.

"I bet this is the first time an antitank gun has tangled with a submarine," Thompkins cried.

"Or a sub has tangled with an antitank gun," Flint said, his face flushed with excitement.

"Well, we both missed . . . which was good," I said. "If we had sunk that thing there would have been a big squabble between Headquarters, Marine Corps, and the Navy back in Washington."

"Uh-huh," Maywell said. "The Navy would have wanted to know where we got the authority to fire on ships, and why we weren't shootin' inland at Jap pedestrians. . . ."

We laughed.

The sub had gone farther out to sea. It had turned again to head toward Tulagi.

"They are going over there to shell them," I said. "They won't do any better there than they did here." We watched the sub's gliding movement. "Looks like they would have hit this

house. They must be able to see it. They aren't that blind."

"They come mighty close," Maywell said.

"They were trying to hit us," I said.

Trenton nodded, waving toward the departing sub. "They'll go home and report they've killed us all."

"Oh, sure . . . They'll tell how they engaged five-inch coast defense guns, or something like that . . . an' a couple of 'em will commit suicide by sitting on a sword, just because they are so happy over it," I said.

"They don't sit on 'em. They cut open their guts after drinkin' some tea . . . Don't you have any manners?" Trenton inquired.

"I wouldn't know how to act in Japan," I said. "I do think they are too emotional about some things. . . ."

"You should never leave a knife lying around over there . . . or serve any tea, either. You just never know what one of those guys has on his mind. He might get a telegram an' have to gut himself at a moment's notice. . . ."

"Nobody can say they haven't got guts," I said.

Trenton scratched a mosquito bite. "Nobody had better say that . . . They might get showed . . . An' all over the floor."

"That's why they sit on the floor, I guess."

"Have you ever tried to sit in an armchair and sword yourself to death?"

I thought this over.

"No," I answered.

"They don't try it either. It ain't possible."

I shook my head. "I wouldn't say that."

"They set on the floor, sip a batch of tea, then open up their kimono . . ."

"Lewd bastards . . ."

"An' take one of them samurai swords in both hands . . ."

"Both hands?"

"Sure . . ."

"How does he hold the teacup?"

"He's finished his tea . . . He does all that first . . ."

"Just tea? No saki . . . no saki time?" I asked.



"Tea . . . He takes this sword in both hands by the handle . . ."

"Good . . . good."

Trenton was demonstrating with his bayonet. The squad was watching in a semihypnotic state.

"An' the samurai sword is just the right length for him to hold the handle with his arms out like this, see . . ." Trenton extended his arms.

"Go on and get it over with so we can bury you," I said.

"Like this . . . an' when it's like this, the point's touching his stomach . . ."

"Abdomen," I said. "His stomach is inside, or is up to this point. People say they rub stomachs, but they are just rubbing abdomens. But that is awfully technical in most situations. I remember . . ."

"All right, abdomen, then . . . abdomen. The point is touching his abdomen an' now he has come to the final step of the ceremony . . ."

"Good," I said. "Go on."

"He sticks the point of the sword through his abdomen several inches . . . well, not quite that far, unless he is pot-bellied, then it's that far . . . It just depends on his gut . . ."

"And how much tea he's had . . ."

"When he does this . . . gets a start . . . he slices away with slow delicate little strokes to show he's in no rush and not being rash about it . . ."

"Not rash?" I was astonished.

"He don't want poeple at the scene to think he is taking the coward's way out . . ."

"Oh, I see . . . just the messy way."

"In this way, he swords himself open, wipes off the weapon which is usually very beautiful . . ." Trenton demonstrated by wiping off the bayonet on his shoe. "Places it to one side." Trenton put the bayonet in the sand. "An' . . ."

"And makes his excuses, gets up and goes home?" I asked.

"An' . . ." Trenton went on, ignoring the interruption, "arranges his guts in a neat pile, closes his kimono . . ."

"Then he makes his excuses, gets up and goes home?"

"No," Trenton said seriously, "He takes a second cup of tea . . . just tea . . . no cream or sugar or lemon."

"Where in the hell did you get all that bum dope?" I asked.

"I read about it somewhere . . ."

"I'll tell you one thing," I said firmly, "I'm not goin' to any Japanese tea parties with you."

Trenton stuck the bayonet in the ground and got to his feet.

Bellflower walked over to him. "That was a good story," he said. "When you goin' to tell another one?" The tone of his voice was like that of a child at the completion of a fairy tale session.

"Bellflower," Trenton smiled, patting him on the shoulder, "any time . . . any time you say . . . you just give the word."

"I sure like to hear you talk." Bellflower shook his head from side to side and peered from under his helmet, which had tilted forward on his head. "That was somethin'. Where you get one of them swords?" He paused to search for words, his gaze on the sand at his feet. "Them sam-ree swords you talked about."

Trenton shook his head, his arm on Bellflower's shoulders. "I don't know, Bellflower; I really don't."

"I sure would like one of them sam-ree swords," Bellflower sighed. "I sure would!"

It was while searching the little tool shed near our air-raid shelter that we discovered the Japanese were conducting an English Language Course on Guadalcanal. We found the evidence in the rubbish. It was a shock to us. We all shared the awe of Americans of that time toward anyone who could speak anything other than English; who could speak more than one language. The idea that an average person should master a language other than the mother tongue was beyond our understanding. This ability, we thought, was limited to college professors who, of necessity, learned other languages to impress people with their scholarship. Even at that, the language they knew would be either Latin or Greek, so they could find their way

among the fraternity houses on campus, read instructions at the bottom of formal invitations, and translate mottoes on coins. Other than these obvious advantages, we believed foreign languages were for foreigners.

So, it was with some excitement we decided the Japs had been receiving formal instruction in English. It was the only conclusion we could reach from evidence we had sifted from scattered papers and a couple of dual language books. The books were first grade primers with pictures of animals and common objects of the home. Under each picture was a Japanese line, and under that, one in English.

Then we discovered the Chart, as it came to be called. It was a novel item. Its design caused us to crowd around for a closer look. We felt a surge of anger at what we saw. For the Chart gave us an insight into the thinking of the enemy. It was clear, too clear, what he had in mind should he conquer our country.

The Guadalcanal English Language Course was unique. Primitive, but effective. Tailored for the purpose of inciting the common slopehead, the instruction as revealed by the Chart was evil and debased. The language instructors had aimed at the savage biological urge they knew and bubbled constantly within their pupils.

The Chart was approximately the size of a newspaper page. It was covered with pen and ink drawings of the letters of our alphabet, with about six characters to the line. Instead of forming these letters with simple lines, as is done in printing, the artist had substituted nude human figures. These figures were arranged in such a way as to make every character, "A" through "Z," a study in sexual deviation and obscenity. In some letters of the alphabet, only male figures in a state of sexual excitement were used. In other drawings, a mixture of male and female bodies was bent, twisted, entwined, and fitted together in a mad orgy to form the desired letter.

The realization that such a revolting creation was a language visual aide, a teaching tool, bore out the knowledge we already had concerning the Japanese as master rapists of conquered

peoples. To train a person in a new language with such methods only served to hold before him lewd mental images any time he happened to see letters or words of that language.

Doubtless, the pupils of this school readily memorized these symbols. Progress must have been rapid and scholarship diligent. English and perversion were taught at the same time. Certainly, this was an unusual approach in the cultivation of the mind. To us it meant one thing above all others. It meant the Japanese would stoop to anything, should they defeat our country, and we resolved that nothing would stop us in an effort to wipe them out.

We got the tool shed cleaned out, divided blank notebook paper we found along with the English Language Course, and decided to use the place as a haven during rainstorms. It was too small for more than three to sleep inside, but otherwise was large enough for everyone. To improve the place, we built a plank seat on each side of the door. The roof projected far enough to keep the seat dry, so we could sit on the front porch, so to speak, and keep a pretty good lookout.

It was during one of these idle days—days when the squad was at loose ends—that we caught the chicken. Actually, it was not much of a catch, for the bird was extremely small—possibly some breed of Bantam, but we didn't realize it at the time. We had wondered why we had not seen any chickens, as it was obvious from "sign," as Bellflower put it, chickens had frequented the backyard of the Coast Guard house. But in spite of spoor and "sign" we had been unable to locate any, and finally came to the conclusion the Japs had taken the birds with them when they fled.

The appearance of this specimen, small as it was, brought a festive mood. About twice the size of a quail, the chicken had a scraggly covering of mottled feathers, some of which were loose and hung out from the others, ready to drop off.

"Let's eat him now," Bellflower, who had little compassion for birds, suggested.

"He's too little," Flint, who had first spied him, said. "Hell, he wouldn't make a meal for one, much less all of us."

Trenton, the connoisseur of exotic foods, felt the chicken carefully. "There won't be nothin' left after we get the feathers off." He raised the tail feathers. "Anyway, we don't want to kill a female."

"What in the hell makes you think that bird is a female?" I asked. "On chickens you look at the head, check combs, and inspect ankles for spurs to tell a rooster from a hen . . . or did you know that."

"Oh," said Trenton, turning the bird around. "No comb, no spurs; it's a female."

"No it ain't," Bellflower asserted as he bent forward for close examination of the tiny fowl. "He ain't nothin', as he's too young."

"You think he'll grow pretty fast?" I asked Bellflower.

"Yep," he answered. "Chickens are fast growers. Don't take long if fed."

"Fed what? What will really fatten 'em up fast?"

"Growin' mash, or some such."

"Great, just great," Trenton declared, holding the chicken at arm's length. "With a start like this, it'll take a month . . . even then, he won't be real big, I bet."

"It's for certain he won't be worth cooking as is," Maywell said sadly. "Why don't we stake him out and keep him awhile? We might need him more later than now."

There was silence for a moment as everyone turned this over in his mind.

"What if he gets away?" Bellflower asked.

"He won't," I said. "Noose him about the ankle and tie him to a stake, or the fence. We'll watch him."

Everybody seemed to agree.

"Get a string, or something, and tie him up," I said. "We'll eat him after a few days . . . a week, maybe."

In this way, the chicken joined our squad. We named it Roberta. If it turned out to be a male, we could drop the "a"—otherwise, we had a feeling this was a female. We wanted to be able to say we were the only squad on the island with female companionship; it made conversation. We swore to guard Ro-

berta, leaving it to the man on duty to see Roberta did not get hurt or stolen.

We were particularly aware of thieves, as we had been stealing everything we could get our hands on. This thievery was centered around food. We received only one ration of food per day from the airport headquarters area, where the cooks were. This was sent to us by truck in a metal can, and was delivered irregularly in late afternoon. Other meals were prepared by us from stolen goods, either Japanese or American, and from coconuts and landing ration bars. During the daylight hours, there were usually two or more members of the squad searching the area for anything they thought we might use. This activity was fairly rewarding, but not overwhelmingly so, and we were hungry most of the time.

It became a constant state of affairs—this hunger—and when it became too persistent, we were forced to munch coconut meat. However, a steady diet of this rich white substance leads without fail to diarrhea, an affliction common enough in the tropics without doing anything to promote it.

Canned items we acquired were buried in the sand near our air-raid shelter. Canned milk was highly prized and fairly plentiful for the first few weeks, after which it disappeared forever. Canned butter from New Zealand was treasured, also. Because of Guadalcanal's temperature, we could punch a hole in a can of butter and pour it out in liquid form. We added this bright yellow fluid to our coffee to give it body, or drank it straight, depending upon how much we had and what other foods we possessed.

The landing ration bars—a chocolate bar fortified with mysterious elements known only to the War Department—were hard slabs guaranteed to contain enough food value to provide energy for a day or two. Ordinarily, it took about two days to eat one bar, as they were slightly bitter and served to kill the appetite, rather than satisfy it. When we had canned milk, we prepared a hot drink using the landing ration bars. The recipe for this was one bar to one can of condensed milk, heated. The mix was prepared by shaving the bar with a knife, allowing the thin

pieces to fall into an empty canteen cup. This process required about fifteen minutes of careful work, as the shavings had to be thin, or they would not dissolve in the milk. A large-size can of condensed milk was then opened and poured into the canteen cup, which was placed in the fire to heat. Occasional stirring with a bayonet turned the mixture into a rich, thick cocoa unequaled for its food value and ability to kill any known appetite for almost twelve hours. Sometimes butter was added, but just a dash.

We hadhardtack, which we swore was surplus from World War I. Some Marines could eathardtack without too much difficulty, but I had to break mine with the bayonet handle. My teeth were not strong enough to bite off a piece ofhardtack and were barely capable of chewing it when it was broken.

Because of our way of life, sweets became a passion. Outdoor work, sleeplessness, and tension increase the body's need for sugar, evidently, for the desire for sweets was very powerful and a constant nag. It is similar to a craving for a smoke by persons who have vowed to quit. Landing rations of the time had one particular can which contained a small offering of hard candy, or jawbreakers. These were prized beyond anything else, but were exceedingly rare. Therefore, the incessant desire for anything sweet lurked in the mind constantly and dominated thinking in the field of food.

The capture of Roberta was excellent luck. It meant we would have fresh meat. As far as we knew, we possessed the only enemy chicken on the entire battlefield. There was no fresh meat to be had on Guadalcanal. Our cooks had no iceboxes, no ice-making machinery, or any way to preserve food. During the first few days on Guadalcanal, a number of cows had been caught. Some Marines had milked these animals and had drunk the scant offerings they had obtained both furtively and in haste. But after headquarters seized the cows and the doctor had made tests, he ordered milking stopped and said they should not be killed for food. They were tubercular.

The wild hogs on the island were full of worms and unfit to eat. The only horse, captured during the second day, threw

his captor, breaking that unhappy Marine's leg against a coconut tree, and bolted for freedom.

We were getting no supplies delivered to the island. We knew there was a real possibility we would become very, very short of food, if we didn't actually starve to death. There is no way to describe how hungry you get when you know there isn't anything to eat, and nothing can be procured. It is a different kind of hunger. It is a greedy hunger. It is a selfish hunger. It tests both the character and the body. And the stomach never allows you to forget it is being tested.

Under these circumstances, men will become bitter and engage in fierce argument over a portion that would be thrown in a civilian garbage can without a second thought. Keen attention is paid to division of food. Imaginary slights are nursed into anger. Bits of food that would have been considered too dirty or too small to eat are hoarded, sometimes elaborately hidden, or taken off to be consumed in secret.

On the other hand, a particularly bountiful theft is eagerly divided with others. Each stuffs himself with no thought for tomorrow. In many cases, however, it was either eat it all or have to throw it away. Milk, for example, could be left open only a very short time before it would be worthless. The moist, germ-filled heat would turn it into a stinking mass. Meat, once the can was opened, had to be consumed within a few hours, or discarded. Only hard candy and landing ration bars would last any period of time. Once opened, a coconut would spoil quickly, though coconuts kept pretty well so long as they were not cracked. A spoiled coconut is spoiled with a vengeance. It emits an odor of sickening rot that is overpowering and draws flies by the thousands. So, we staked out Roberta and watched over her.

There was an increasing number of air raids by Japanese bomber formations, by fighter planes and by night flights. The most noteworthy nighttime visitation was that of Washing Machine Charlie, a single-engine craft that droned about for lengthy periods, finally dropped one bomb, and droned away.

The first night Washing Machine Charlie came, we had just bedded down for the night. It was an hour or so after dark.



We heard this odd, deep-throated *thrumm-thrumm, thrumm-thrumm*. The beat of the motor exactly duplicated the sound of a Maytag washing machine of the day, only it was louder and deeper; but the beat was the same.

We knew it was a plane, but we could not decide what kind of plane. All Japanese planes had a distinct engine sound which we learned to recognize with startling rapidity, but this plane, though following the general Japanese pattern, had a distinctive sound. It flew over us in the darkness, wandered up and down the coastline, drifted inland and circled up and down in the airfield area. Up and down, round and round, it circled and flew without haste and very low. We were all awake. We tried to decipher the intent of the pilot by the sound of his plane. We wondered if it were a scout plane off a cruiser. If so, it meant a night bombardment, or, quite possibly, a night assault landing. In view of these possibilities, we had to man the cannon with a full crew and sweep the water constantly with binoculars.

He kept at it. Up and down the sky over the beach; low, but out of sight in the blackness. Then, inland again, up and down; then circles, gaining altitude; then, with increasing noise, a swoop downward as the engine's revolutions speeded up and filled the night with a muffled roar; finally, he would slow down again, the *thrumm-thrumm, thrumm-thrumm* beating the atmosphere above us. This went on and on until, at last, the bomb was released, whistled to earth, and exploded with a crackling *thrum* somewhere in the airfield area to our rear.

On the first night, we did not know how many bombs he carried. All the time he played, we were on edge until the first bomb fell, and when he did not leave, we expected another. None came. But he remained. Slowly, lazily circling; sometimes sounding as though he were just above our palm trees; sometimes throbbing faintly over enemy territory. Then he left, his engines beating into the far distance until they fell silent in our ears.

This plane was to become famous over Guadalcanal. It came back night after night; sometimes twice in one night. Each time to drop one bomb; each time to hover, circle, play, and ramble

for endless minutes. It became a challenge, a psychological victory, to shoot him down. Efforts were made to blast him from the sky. They failed. Traps were set. They failed. Attempts were made to sleep through his routine visits. They failed. The pilot knew the area well enough to fly low over everyone. He never dropped his bomb until he had harassed and violated the rest of every Marine. He was unhurried, loud, persistent.

On the few occasions he did not make his trip to our besieged lines, it was as effective as if he had. Marines had gotten to expect him; somehow, he had become part of the night. Marines decided not to sleep until he had come and gone. What was the use? They would only be awakened when he did appear. So, they waited for him, tired, heavy-eyed, staring into the night. He didn't come. He has finally quit, they would decide after a couple of nights, and stretch out to drift off into exhausted slumber. As certain as doom, Washing Machine Charlie would bustle in, visit and visit and visit, drop his bomb, linger awhile, and fly away. He never dropped his bomb in the same area twice, though he preferred the airfield, for it was there supplies were concentrated. The hospital, headquarters, and ammunition dumps were in that area. He visited them all.

During these raids—and daytime raids, too—we would rush to Roberta, catch her, and carry her with us. If it became necessary for us to dive into the air-raid shelter, she went with us.

We didn't keep Roberta tied up long. We felt sorry for her. More important, she did not appear to eat as well as a prisoner. We released her. But by then, she had become tame. She was our friend and followed one or another of us like a dog.

During daylight bomber raids, we would shoo Roberta before us as we rushed for shelter. Daylight raids were conducted by thirty large bombers, sometimes more . . . on some occasions there were seventy. They were poor shots. Though we knew they were trying to hit the airfield, they frequently missed. When they missed, the bombs, quite often, fell in our section of the woods. We took no chances on Japanese marksmanship.

These raids were regular things. We had one or more of

some type every day. Since we had no planes of our own at this time, we were the perfect military target: stationary, big, helpless. Even at that, it was astonishing how little real damage the Japanese planes accomplished considering the number of attempts they made.

Evidently, Roberta learned to associate Japanese motors with the air-raid shelter. One day, we noticed Roberta running for this haven of safety. Her scraggly wings were held out from her body and almost touched the ground. Little bits of sand popped in the air behind her as her thin feet worked like pistons. She swept by us and disappeared into the entrance of the shelter.

"What's got into her?" Bellflower cried. "Is somethin' after Roberta?"

We saw nothing. Worried that our future Sunday dinner might be in trouble, we charged to the shelter and looked at the entrance. Roberta was calmly scratching in sand.

"Maybe she had a fit of some sort, or has got worms," Bellflower suggested, still worried.

We turned to leave. Suddenly, we heard them. Japanese bombers, faint and far away. The air-raid siren at the airfield began its muffled cry.

"Bless her little heart," Trenton grinned. "Roberta heard those planes before we did. She knew just what to do. Now, ain't that smart?" He bent over Roberta and stroked her feathers. Several came out and fluttered to the ground.

From then on, Roberta was an unfailing early-warning system—if you happened to be watching her at the right instant. We were proud of her, this sweet, homeless chicken. And our attitude toward Roberta began to change. We began to wonder about Roberta. We wondered if we could cook her; if we could snap her wishbone after the meal and sincerely make a wish that would come true.

These doubts were unspoken for a long time, and it was Roberta herself who finally resolved the question of her own fate.

The Coast Guard used their house as a headquarters and a communications center. They ate there at night, and their commander lived there. We never knew exactly how many of these men there were, but there were several. They kept busy with their boats farther down the beach during the day, so there was very little communication between us. We never got together for a bull session. There was rarely a chance to even speak to them. We thought nothing of this, as they had their job to do and we had ours.

Late one afternoon, their commander came to our gun position and introduced himself. I have forgotten his name, as this was one of only two occasions we talked together.

During the day, we had gotten information over our field telephone of a possible Japanese raid. The feeling at headquarters was that they would try to hit the beach. The enemy had been more active at night, there had been exchanges between patrols and air raids had been stepped up. These are normal indications something is being planned.

Under these conditions, we were glad to see the commander. We felt we might get some news out of him we didn't have. Information is never complete, as far as enlisted men are concerned, and usually when they receive any reliable news, it is bad, that things are bad and are expected to get even worse.

The commander was tall, gracious, and neat. He wore an informal summer uniform of trousers, shirt with open collar, and cap. His clothing was clean and pressed, but he did not look out of place, though it was evident he was not in the infantry. His cleanliness tended to bear out what we had long suspected: that there was a bathtub in the frame house. We bathed in the surf, having been forced to it. These ocean baths were cooling, but left us salty, sticky, and with little less sand on us than we had had before. We also considered them dangerous, as the enemy was in rifle shot of our position. Due to the way the island curved out to sea, any interested Japanese could see us with little difficulty, and, if he wanted to cause trouble, could try to kill us as we sloshed around in the shallows in the nude. I had often thought how embarrassing it would have been to be

killed while bathing in the nude on a tropical beach. I could almost see the line in the hometown newspaper: "He was killed as he stood nude near enemy lines. Headquarters, Marine Corps, in Washington said it could not explain this and is awaiting further information from Guadalcanal."

The more I thought about it, the less funny it became. Yet, the refreshment of a dip in the ocean after a few days without a bath was irresistible. It was a chance you had to take; at least, it seemed that way at the time. So, all of us took it. And the fact we were risking all for a bath, made the suspicion there was a bathtub in the frame house a burning ethical problem. The tub should be as much ours as it was theirs. We spent much time discussing it. But we never came to any conclusion, other than we should be able to use it, if it were in there.

We never got to use it.

The commander wanted to know if we knew anything about a forthcoming enemy attack.

"We got a call there might be one tonight," I said. "So we will be at this gun and will be up all night. We also have a .50-caliber machine gun on the truck, which will be parked over there by our air-raid shelter in case we need to spray some."

"I thought what I had heard was right."

"What did you hear, sir?"

"That the Japs might try for the beach."

"You don't know anything more? Where are they coming from?"

"No. That's all I heard. I wanted to check and see if there was anything from you fellows."

"That's all we got. We are supposed to give headquarters a call on the field phone if we see any ships, or anything out on the water. But the damn phone never works when we need it. Trucks run over the wire, I guess, and break it . . . an' Japs cut wire when they see any. It doesn't matter whether it's connected to anything. They cut it anyway. We have to have our wire spliced almost every day. But it's been checked this afternoon, and the phone is working now."

He smiled and nodded his head. "Glad to hear that. But

what I really came over for was to see if you fellows would be here tonight. If you were moving to another position, I wanted to know about it."

"No, we'll be here, as far as we know."

"My men can stay at the house, then," he said.

"I thought they stayed there all the time. I mean at night; I thought they slept there." It seemed strange he was worried about this particular night. Why hadn't he checked on us before?

"If you were going to move, I was going to send them back to the airfield . . . around headquarters for the night." He paused a moment. "You see, they aren't armed . . . they have no weapons."

"No weapons?" I was taken aback. They were in the middle of a battle and had no weapons.

"That's right. We depend upon you fellows here to protect us. That's why we are glad to have you set up so near. We haven't had to worry about it. But they aren't armed."

"Well, we are. But don't you think you ought to get some rifles or pistols, or something?" This was the most fantastic thing I had ever heard.

"They don't need any with you people here. They haven't a bit of use for weapons in the work they are doing. It's better they don't carry them. You people are right here. If something happens, they can come over and help, or can move back toward headquarters."

"I guess they had better move back," I said. "If we need help, it will be too late. The Japs will be on the beach. We'll start firing on their boats as soon as we see 'em. Our infantry will move up behind us as soon as they can . . . they'll have to come from some other part of the line. We won't be able to move backward or forward. We are stuck here. So, you don't have to worry about us moving out tonight, unless they hit at a different spot. If they do, I'll wake you up."

"That's fine." He seemed very pleased with the arrangements.

"When's a ship coming in?" I asked, hoping to be the first to know.

"Hard to tell." His face was serious. "It will be awhile. They

will probably wait until some American planes come in to give them air cover."

"I guess so." That wasn't much help. We had been wondering for days when the planes would come in. It kept being "tomorrow."

The commander started to move off. He smiled and we shook hands again.

"Glad you came over, sir," I told him. "Come back to see us."

"Fine. I will," he said.

During the night we discussed in whispers the unarmed Coast Guard. We couldn't understand it. What if a Jap slipped into the house? He'd cut their throats before they knew what was happening; or shoot them. Didn't the commander know we were in a war?

"You wouldn't catch me here without no rifle," Bellflower said.

"Me, either," Trenton agreed.

"They have a lot of faith in us," Gleason yawned, rubbing his nose. "Damn mosquito bit me right on the tip of the nose." He rubbed vigorously.

"They are out tonight. I been bit a dozen times," Maywell complained.

The *thrumm-thrumm* of Washing Machine Charlie began to develop in the distance. He was coming over Cape Esperance, the point of land that curved out from Guadalcanal to our left, it sounded like.

"Here comes that bastard," Bellflower said without emotion. Behind us the air-raid warning began.

We lay still by the gun. Unless he came over us, we would not head for our shelter. He droned well inland, heading for the field. We listened with practiced ears. He flew around for a half hour, then dropped the bomb and left.

"He's got a date at Truk," I said, referring to the Japanese fortress to the north.

"Uh-huh," Gleason said.

"I hear they haul 'em in from Tokyo for the officers," Trenton said wistfully.

"Who told you that?"

"Didn't you see all them women's things in those shacks back toward the field when we went through? All that stuff?"

"I didn't see no women," Bellflower said.

There was no arguing with that. We sat in silence. It was a long, slow night. Nothing happened.

Roberta was a constant eater. She was quick to spot food, both by eye and by other methods, and she was becoming a nuisance. What was worse, she had not grown at all; furthermore, she had not gained an ounce in spite of the fact she was eating something all the time. It seemed her boundless energy in search of food burned up what might have become flesh had she not been so constantly scratching and pecking.

Her feathers continued to fall out, though she never appeared to have any less. This process was deeply mysterious. From the amount of small feathers scattered around our little community, it would bring any logical mind to the conclusion Roberta should be covered only with skin. This was not the case. She was as disheveled as ever and rather bleary-eyed. It was beginning to become quite clear that Roberta would never become a fat hen, or rooster—we never settled the question of sex.

The food problem was worse, as far as we were concerned. Our hope that Roberta would provide a meal of real consequence was fading fast. Each day, she became more of a living failure in our eyes, looked scrawnier and more repulsive.

One morning, a delicious odor drifted over us and investigation proved it to be coming from the backyard of the Coast Guard house. We looked through the chicken-wire fence. A cook was busily tossing flapjacks into the air. The sight was breathtaking. We had forgotten such beauty existed, and we watched, stomachs vibrating, mouths watering, and trigger fingers twitching.

The cook had built a small outdoor griddle from bricks and a piece of flat iron. Now a fire burned brightly and flapjacks toasted in the morning sun. Beautiful things . . . beautiful,



beautiful things. We watched too overcome, too weakened by the sight, to speak for a few minutes.

"Bellflower," I said quietly, trying to keep my voice calm, "go over there and make friends with him. See how he is."

Bellflower was gone in an instant. We watched through the wire. Bellflower walked up to the griddle and stood quietly, gazing on the flapjacks.

"Flapjacks?" we heard him say.

"Yeah," said the cook without looking up. He patted a flapjack with his flipper.

"Look good," Bellflower said with commendable restraint.

"What you want?" the cook was a surly beast.

"How about a flapjack?" Bellflower blurted out.

"Ain't got enough to feed a bunch of Marines," the cook snarled.

Bellflower glared at him from under his helmet. It was a pitiful sight. There was this starving bum, hollow-eyed, dirty, his stomach growling in agony, trying to get up enough strength to slink away after the cruel rebuff. Finally, he slowly turned and walked around the house and returned to us.

"Let's kill him and get the flapjacks," he said. "They ain't armed."

"Aw, no, Bellflower. We can't do that. It ain't worth it," Thompsons said without conviction.

"Yeah it is," Bellflower said.

"Did they have syrup?" I asked.

"Uh-huh."

"Let's think this thing out," I said, and we held a council on top of the air-raid shelter.

We sat. Deep concentration settled upon us. We strained our imaginations. It must be done. It would be done. But how? About then, Roberta tripped by. The solution came to us, all of us in a great flash of syrupy light.

"Roberta!" we shouted.

"This afternoon go over and ask him if he wants to trade a chicken for a bottle of syrup," I told Bellflower.

"Why not now?"

"He's too busy. Let him eat a couple of times. Then talk to him. See what he says."

"Okay."

That afternoon, Bellflower returned to the backyard of the Coast Guard. He was gone a long time. We had resolved not to watch. It was too much . . . we couldn't bear it. We tried to just forget about it. Just drop it from our minds. But we couldn't. We were crazed by the thought of syrup. Thompkins had taken the truck and had gone back to headquarters to get the water can filled. While there he was to negotiate for a couple of handfuls of flour. We weren't worried about getting the flour. One of the guys working the cook tent had been through boot camp with Thompkins. Everything depended on the syrup. We had a can of New Zealand butter buried—and a can of milk. We had everything for flapjacks but syrup. Life itself depended upon Bellflower.

Near the end of eternity Bellflower returned. His face was wreathed in smiles.

"He wants to see the chicken."

"Great God!" Trenton sobbed.

"Wait, Bellflower," I said, placing my hand on his arm to stop him as he scooped up Roberta and prepared to go back to the Coast Guard. "Tell him we just found this pullet, and it is a Rhode Island Red, or something, and will grow into a very large, fat hen."

"It ain't no Rhode Island Red," he said.

"Hell, I know that! But he don't know it, damn it!"

"He must be stupid."

"Let's hope so," I said. "Now, what you goin' to say?"

"I goin' to tell him the truth."

"*The truth?*"

"Yeah, that it's a Rhode Island Red pullet, or some such."

We all laughed hysterically. The strain of having Bellflower operate in the field of diplomacy and international trade was telling on us.

"Walk in the light, Bellflower," I said.

Bellflower and Roberta disappeared from view. The waiting

period began all over again. We even went to work. We cleaned up around the place, wiped off the weapons, though they didn't need it. Checked ammunition. Gazed at loose feathers and watched them as they were stirred by the tropical breeze. I remembered all the flapjacks I had ever seen, or eaten. I compared flapjacks in my mind and watched an endless river of syrup flow like Niagara Falls over them. I could remember exactly how the first bite of a cornmeal flapjack tasted, all crisp and soaked in butter and syrup, swimming in syrup. I even remembered a cane mill at a Georgia convict camp I had visited as a child. I could see the sugar cane being fed between big rollers that squeezed out the juice as a team of mules turned them round and round. The juice flowed in a steady stream into a big metal vat, and from there drizzled into shallow pans to be evaporated into delicious, thick, sweet syrup. There is no better syrup than this—not if it's fresh from the evaporating pans and hot.

Bellflower appeared suddenly before me. He seemed to materialize. In his hand was a bottle of syrup.

"He done it."

"What did he say?" I could barely get out the words. My eyes were riveted to the bottle of syrup.

"Roberta was awful small, he said. But I said she was young and had just been hatched since we been here. An' he asked what kind it was and I said it was a Japanese Rhode Island Red, which is a different color from ours. It come to me that Rhode Island Reds is red. Roberta is kind of gray-brown and speckled."

"What else did he say?" Trenton demanded, red-faced, hands shaking with excitement.

Bellflower grinned. His face was streaked with sweat. It was dirty, as usual.

"Say somethin', damn you!" Trenton glared into Bellflower's eyes.

"He didn't want Roberta at first because she was so small. I told him he didn't want no full-growed chicken that was tough . . . an' this hen was just a pullet, and would fatten and be

tender. Roberta would be awful good boiled, I told him . . . An', well, he wanted that chicken."

"Take the day off, Bellflower," Trenton laughed.

Thompkins was successful, too. And we had flapjacks. We made a goo with flour and canned milk. A thick paste mixed in a helmet from which the liner had been removed. We poured this on a hot mess kit cover. It browned and cooked up pretty well. But it really didn't make any difference. It was the syrup that was the power and the glory. We poured syrup and melted butter over the cakes, chewed, and slowly entered a state of bliss—a gourmet's heaven. It was a good meal. And Roberta, well, we knew she was safe. She wouldn't grow any more, no matter how much she ate, and she wasn't big enough for a meal. We knew that. She would be their pet, rather than their meal. They deserved her.

Though the Japanese possessed considerable cleverness, the average Nip could not be classified as an intellectual. He was more of an animal. He could live on a handful of rice. He could tie himself in a tree and snipe for days with full knowledge he would be killed; it was only a matter of time. He seemed to be able to decide to die, and do it. It was like planning a suicide. The Japanese seem to get a grotesque pleasure from self-destruction, from planned death, whether by their own hands or by the hands of others. Life did not hold the sacred value life holds for us; to them life was of little value and could be spent recklessly. They were a reckless enemy; unthinking sheep eager to die, therefore very dangerous. Since life was meaningless, they were bold. They were motivated by their religious beliefs. To die for the Emperor was the highest honor. Their thinking seemed to be focused upon death as the ultimate goal, rather than victory and life. Their view was death and victory. They wanted victory, but they didn't care whether or not they were there to enjoy it.

Marines wanted victory, but they wanted to live, also. Marines devoutly prayed they would be spared death. They were

not reluctant to fight; but they fought for different reasons than the enemy. They fought for victory and life.

A Japanese soldier was at no time so transparent as when he was trying to be shrewd. These efforts by the Japanese led to such unbelievable activities as blowing a bugle for the purpose of trying to trick Marines into thinking fellow Leathernecks were in a sector they were not. This trick never worked. The Japanese made mistakes that ruined their plan: they never blew the right bugle call at the right time, and, second, Marines don't use bugles in battle. They must have gotten the idea from old American Western movies.

English-speaking Japs loved to hide within shouting distance of the lines and bellow commands. Obviously this was intended to lure Marines into a trap. The Japanese could never get the English commands right. Anyway, parade ground commands are not shouted on the battlefield. So, this activity invariably failed to give the proper result, as far as the Japanese were concerned. There is the story that a Marine sergeant was leading a line of men through the jungle when spied by a Jap with several men of his own. The Jap shouted some English commands at the Marines, evidently with the idea of causing confusion that would result in his men being able to wipe out the Marines. On hearing the commands and glimpsing the Jap through the growth, the Marine sergeant shouted at him, "You run your damn outfit, and I'll run mine."

On other occasions, Japanese would try to taunt Marines with shouts of "death," and something that sounded like "sunny-bitchy Marine dogs," and other phrases that were more humorous than frightening.

This sort of thing led to a story that went the rounds on Guadalcanal. Whether or not it is true, I never found out. But it makes a good story, anyway, and it's typical.

A particularly obnoxious Jap was shouting taunts from the brush at a squad of Marines one day. And after an exchange of "sunny-bitchy Marine dogs" from him and "yellow-bellied slope-heads" from the Marines, the Jap decided to bellow the most frightening thing he could imagine. He crashed around in

the bushes for a time, then came out with a mighty verbal blast, "Blood for the Emperor . . . banzai . . . banzai . . . banzai, sunny-bitches."

This left all the Marines speechless, but one, whose gravel voice responded with shattering parade ground volume, "To hell with the Emperor . . . blood for Eleanor."

Mrs. Roosevelt would have been proud, had she been there. It was becoming One World, indeed.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### The Cloak of Mold

The Jap was short, unarmed, and had materialized suddenly on the beach. We were surprised at how small and thin he was, and how youthful-looking. He was wearing khaki shorts and a khaki shirt, open to show his narrow chest. Marines gathered in a small knot of sweaty dungarees and dangling web belts hung with sagging canteens, knives, and bayonets to observe him. They held rifles and Reising submachine guns loosely in their hands as they gazed with open curiosity at the amazing find.

"Sit down," I told him, indicating sand in front of a fallen coconut tree. He didn't understand. "What's Jap for 'sit down'?" I asked the group standing silent, staring at the prisoner.

There was no answer. A Marine pointed at the sand and squatted. "Sit down, Tojo," he said in a loud voice, as Americans do when trying to communicate with a foreigner, or with a deaf person.

The Jap looked blank.

A Marine pressed down on his shoulders and forced the Jap to the ground. The prisoner was obviously frightened. His eyes were wide and the black centers glassy in the glare of the

beach. Marines in the group began to taunt the Jap. They made signs of throat-cutting, belly-splitting, and cursed loudly. The Jap sat silent, afraid.

"Knock it off," I said. "He can't hurt anybody."

Some of the cursing continued, but the signs stopped.

"I'll call headquarters," Trenton said. "They will want him . . . maybe the Japs have run out of saki, or want to borrow a cup of sugar, or somethin'."

"Okay," I said. "I think they have somebody who speaks Jap. Tell 'em to send him."

Trenton trotted off toward the air-raid shelter where the field phone was tied to a tree. The Jap sat motionless, staring at the ground. He was extremely young, sixteen or seventeen, not much more than that; possibly even younger.

Trenton returned. "They're coming to get him. They are all excited about him."

"Well, don't let him get away," I said. "They would probably shoot us all . . . Where did you find him?" I asked a Marine who had seemed to be the first man near the Jap.

"Just on the beach. I don't understand how he got this far without nobody seein' him."

"He must have wanted to get caught."

"Yeah, looks that way. He's probably full of bum dope."

"They don't just give up."

"Naw, he wanted to get caught. Thin, ain't he?"

"Is he circumcised?" Bellflower asked. He had been asleep, but the commotion had brought him around.

"Leave religion out of this," Trenton said to Bellflower.

"Can't you think of anything else? . . . You want to give him a short arm?"

"I always wondered," Bellflower persisted. "The Good Book says . . ."

"You goin' to get into that thing about David and the Philistines again, Bellflower?" Trenton snorted. "Great God! They don't do them things any more . . . not that way . . ."

The little circle of Marines was listening intently. The question of whether Japanese were circumcised had aroused great in-



terest. The Jap appeared not to understand the subject of conversation.

"What's that about David and them Philistines?" a voice from the group inquired. There was a murmur of support from the other Marines.

Bellflower took a deep breath. This always indicated a religious discourse. "The Good Book says . . ."

"Aw, damn, Bellflower . . ."

"What about it?" The group was eager to hear Bellflower.

"Well, David was goin' to marry old King Saul's daughter and he told David he didn't want no dowry . . . except one thing. He told David . . . he had his servants to do it, as the king didn't ever say nothin' direct . . ."

"Like the Corps." The Marines laughed softly.

"He told his servants to tell David he didn't want no dowry, just a couple hundred foreskins from them Philistines. They had been a campaign on for a long time against them Philistines because they was not circumcised and everybody else was . . ."

This was a sore subject with Trenton; it was a matter of freedom and principle. "It was none of their business whether they did it or not. Them people was crazy . . ."

"Well, the King—that is old King Saul—figured David would get killed and that would get rid of him for good—but he didn't know David. When David got the word, 'he rose and went.' The Good Book says . . ."

"And he took a squad with him," Trenton said.

"He took some friends and they snuck over to the Philistine camp and killed two hundred of them and cut off their foreskins for King Saul's dowry . . . The Good Book says they 'gave them in full tale to the king,' and when they done that they wasn't nothin' old Saul could do but give David his daughter, which made David son-in-law of Saul, and kin."

"Now ain't that carrying it too far?" Trenton asked the group. "You know them Philistines thought David was a damn nut . . . why they'd put him in the booby hatch if he run around today doin' things like that."

"That's what he done!" Bellflower said in a firm voice.

"I'd of shot his head off if he come up to me like that," a tall, lanky Marine growled.

"Me, too," another said.

"He was nuts," Trenton said. "I told Bellflower that and he don't think so . . . He thinks it was perfectly normal . . . Just running around cutting off foreskins . . . that ain't normal."

"I don't believe it," the lanky Marine said.

"It's in the Good Book," Bellflower assured him. "In the Old Testament, back in First Samuel somewheres."

"All I got's the New Testament . . . one of them little books they give out. . . ."

"Me, too."

"They ain't no Old Testaments around, or I'd show it to you," Bellflower said. "But it's there. Everybody's supposed to be circumcised."

"Or else," Trenton said. "Bellflower, you are a damn nut . . . an' Saul and David was nuts, too . . ."

A jeep appeared on the beach. It reached the circle of Marines and a colonel hopped out, followed by three other Marines, all officers. The circle parted and the colonel hurried through, smiling with pleasure.

"What have we got here, boys?" he said.

"A Jap . . . found him walking up the beach, just wanderin' around," the Marine who had first spotted the prisoner said.

The colonel spoke a number of words in Japanese to the prisoner. The Jap's eyes lighted up.

"I told you we had somebody who could speak Jap," I said to Trenton.

"We'll take him back with us . . . good work, boys," the colonel said. The group hurried back to the jeep, got in with the prisoner and left.

The men broke up. It was the first live Jap we had seen at close quarters.

"Maybe he'll tell 'em something," I said.

"Probably a bunch of lies," Trenton observed.

"Yeah," I said. You couldn't trust a Jap.

On August 12, 1942, we were notified by Lieutenant Rose that a large group of Japanese prisoners was expected to be escorted down the beach from the direction of the Matanikau River, which was to our left toward Cape Esperance in the west. This group was to come by us about sundown, would march across our front down the beach, then cut inland for headquarters. This was done because the open beach gave a good field of fire should the prisoners bolt.

A Japanese prisoner had told interrogators thirty to fifty Japanese were starving and wanted to give up. They only awaited escort through our lines. He was the messenger and would guide Marines to these disheartened troops.

"Keep watch for them," Lieutenant Rose instructed us. "Keep all weapons manned . . . and keep them trained on the group . . . but don't fire. If it's a trick for some sort of banzai, let 'em have it. But if they are walking along in a group with Marines herding 'em, don't shoot."

It didn't make sense to us, but orders were orders. We manned the guns late in the afternoon and watched the beach, waiting to see the parade. The hours dragged by. Nobody showed. We looked into the magnificent sunset, a sky splashed with bright pure colors of indescribable intensity and beauty; a great theatrical backdrop crossing the breadth of the heavens in a final breaking up of light at the end of the day. The light faded, growing weaker and weaker, the colors grew dim and disappeared to be replaced by shades of pale white and gray that thickened into intense blackness of night spotted by globes of bluish-white stars. Nobody walked the beach. No human figure, no group, no triumphant herd or bag of war.

We decided to keep a full-strength watch—another sleepless night for everybody. We lay in the sand, the snout of our cannon pointed westward, its breech open and inside a round of canister slept, awaiting only the closing of the breech and a tap of the trigger. We strained our eyes, pressing binoculars against them to cut the night. We saw nothing. The sea was clear. The sand of the beach, barren and empty.

Washing Machine Charlie came and went. The night stumbled

by on feet of lead, then melted into reds, and greens and bright pinks of dawn as the heavy dew of night's tearful eyes glittered in millions of diamonds from every bush and tree. The morning breeze sprang fresh from the sea and the blazing sun, red-eyed from Tokyo, peeped over the horizon. Thus day began as it had from eternity, a holy, wondrous sight still.

"They must have changed their minds . . . backed out, or else nobody went to get 'em," Gleason said, yawning and stretching. "I'm goin' to get a little sleep before it gets too hot . . . I'm knocked out." He stretched in the sand.

Bellflower went to build the fire for coffee.

It was strange. The order from the beginning was strange. We all had discussed it. We thought it had been a dangerous order.

What if a group had appeared in the night? We couldn't fire. And if they got close, they could have overwhelmed us before we could have decided what to do—before we could have acted. We were under orders not to fire; if they had acted strangely, we would have been reluctant to shoot them down. One round from our cannon would have been like a thousand blades of flying steel among them. It would have been slaughter. It wasn't like shooting a rifle bullet into them; it was like shooting a sawed-off shotgun. So, even if our suspicions had been aroused, we would have hesitated to fire, afraid we would kill our own men.

They had not come down the beach. The whole plan had fallen through.

Lieutenant Rose, who came later in the morning to get Trenton, said nothing had been heard from the patrol. The Marines had gone out all right. All from Intelligence, and scouts; picked men, cream of the headquarters G-2 section under the command of a full colonel. Around twenty-five. They had gone in a Higgins boat and headed for a village near the Matanikau River. They planned to land at the beach near the village, get the Japs, and bring them back. Since they didn't show up at sundown, they were expected during the day. We were to keep watching for them.

We did. Nothing came down the beach.

They never came down the beach. They were all dead, except

three, who had barely escaped—one had swum to safety thinking he was all that was left. He had been spotted in the water near our lines, about a half mile from our gun position, and hauled ashore, exhausted.

He told a story of horror. The patrol had barely hit the beach, following the Jap prisoner and guide, when they were cut down by the Japanese hidden in the brush, waiting for the innocent to follow the Judas goat to death. They killed the goat, too.

This was the first mass killing of Marines on Guadalcanal. We were shocked. Shocked because we had fallen for such an obvious trap; shocked because headquarters had believed anything a Jap had to say; shocked and angry and sickened because the Japanese had been able to kill so many and suffer no deaths in return.

We wondered if the Jap we had held on the beach a few days earlier had been the Judas goat. We decided he had been. He had come from the direction of the Matanikau River. He had appeared unarmed, wanting to be captured. We wished we had killed him then. If we had, it might have saved the Lost Patrol. The story of starving Japs should have been transparent enough for anyone to see through. The Japanese couldn't be any more hungry than we were, and the thought of surrendering had never occurred to us. The Japanese, we knew, preferred death to surrender; we wondered why this simple fact had not presented itself to the minds of those at headquarters.

The loss of this patrol, and the particularly cruel way in which they had met death, hardened our hearts toward the Japanese. The idea of taking prisoners was swept from our minds. It was too dangerous.

The bodies of the men on the Lost Patrol were never found.

We were without air cover for eleven days. On each of these days, the Japanese took more and more advantage of our helplessness. We were trapped. The enemy held more of the island than we did; he had more freedom of movement; he dominated

the air; he was master of the sea; he was on three sides of us on land, on the sea to our backs, and in the sky above us.

This was the situation when the Associated Press filed a dispatch from Washington on August 20, 1942, informing the world the Navy officially reported the "Solomon Archipelago" as "'captured.'" The Navy was in no position to know what the status of the Solomons was, as it had not been near the place. The dispatch contained this grimly humorous paragraph:

The Navy said that while the Leathernecks were busy with this task (mopping up "remnants of Japanese forces on the islands"), Japanese aircraft, destroyers and submarines engaged in casual bombardment of the newly-won shore positions. They inflicted only minor damage, but a Japanese destroyer or cruiser was bombed and set afire by American aircraft . . .

The *Birmingham Age-Herald* of August 21, 1942, carried this story with a seven-column streamer on page one: MARINES CLINCH ISLES CAPTURE, and the three-column deck beneath:

U.S. "MOPS UP" JAP FORCES LEFT WHEN WARSHIPS RETREAT.

At no other time in World War II were the Japanese to have U. S. Marines in such a state of weakness for so long. The Japanese inability to coordinate their forces against us and to wipe us out by sheer weight of land, sea, and air superiority is to the eternal discredit of their arms.

This lack of coordination, this lack of military leadership of even the most simple degree of efficiency, led to the eventual Japanese defeat on Guadalcanal. They could have had the victory.

When they lost Guadalcanal, they lost the war. Guadalcanal was the turning point in the Pacific; when they lost the Battle of the Solomons, they lost every battle that followed. The Japanese realized the crucial importance of Guadalcanal. The very fact that they did realize this should have caused them to move troops at once against the Marines with the selfless determination they so often demonstrated later in the war.

But they did not.

On August 20, 1942, two squadrons of our planes arrived at Henderson Field, as the airfield had been named in honor of Major Lofton R. Henderson, the Marine Corps flier who had gallantly died at Midway in June. There was one squadron of fighters and one squadron of torpedo planes, or dive bombers. They were the offering of the Arsenal of Democracy to its own. The planes came as knights in shining armor. With spirit, pride, and devil-may-care dash, they climbed over us, high above the sweltering island, zoomed, looped, dived, rolled, and swept over our miserable foxholes to whip about in an aerial circus filled with noise and daring.

We watched, thunderstruck and awe inspired. We were as shepherds centuries before abiding in the field when suddenly surrounded by winged creatures bearing glad tidings of great joy.

We watched with gladness, knowing now America really did have aircraft, like everyone else in the war, and Uncle Sam, rich and strong, had suddenly remembered to cast a few our way, as one would throw new dimes to the starving multitude in the tradition of Ormond Beach, Florida, golfers of the recent past. This glittering, silver-winged treasure we scooped to our hearts. We vowed we had never seen anything so precious, or so fine—so wonderfully great and powerful—in all our lives.

Had we possessed whiskey, we would have gotten drunk. As it was, the sailors had already consumed the alcohol in the compasses of the smallboats. Fermentation of pineapple juice had proved impossible due to lack of sugar and the flies distilleries attracted. Though raisins had been found good alcohol producers by some squads in the jungle, we did not have any.

So, we watched the acrobatics soberly, but not without emotion.

Until these planes had arrived, we only had been able to watch as helpless observers the steady passage of Japanese bombers over us and accept their cargoes of bombs as prisoners accept the lash in fear and pain. We would look into the clear,

blue sky to see the Japanese craft fly with majestic slowness, their engines throbbing with deep-throated beehive-like *thrum-thrums* unlike any other airplane engines we had ever heard. They would come from the west, usually. This meant they would open bomb bays well before they got to our gun position, and would begin discharging long strings of bombs, clearly visible to us when they left the planes, as they approached our little spot of earth. We would follow these missiles of death with our eyes, each bomb, it seemed, meant for ourselves alone, as they came down toward us. Each of us prayed in silent, helpless woe, indeed, in fear and agony of heart and mind, that these great, unthinking, merciless, and deadly things would not strike us that day.

The bombs would fall from the bays in fairly orderly rows and would seem to drift over our position, their piercing screams growing louder as they neared the earth, and before we lost sight of them in the coconut fronds, we would know they would hit behind us and in the area of the airfield. Henderson Field was always the target. We knew that. But we knew, too, if the Japanese in the lead plane, which evidently carried the bombsight—if they used one—miscalculated and dropped his bombs too soon, the other planes would miscalculate, too, and the bombs would fall among us.

Day after day these bombers came. The arrival of American planes did not halt them. Our planes took fantastic toll, but they did not halt them. They kept coming day after day, week after week, month after month. Our planes caused them to miscalculate, caused them to drop their bombs early and attempt to flee, and a new horror came upon those of us near the Matanikau River and on the beach. We came to fear air raids as a torture is feared; they were the rack upon which we were slowly drawn and pulled within reach of Death's horrid kiss. The time came when we fell to the earth, panting for breath, as we listened to the inexorable march of bombs along the beach toward us, or through the coconut trees, each shattering, deafening blast closer still—each explosion following another in



hammerlike beats that shook the ground. This great blasting of the earth lifted us into the air with each detonation as a tossing bed lifts a child to drop him down again. As the shattering blasts shook us and singing metal cut trees about us, and as the bombs walked toward us with measured pace, by some grace of God they stepped over us, and walked on. One could not help but wonder by what saving chance—by what fluke of fate—was it the bombs missed. Why was it they never fell upon our own bodies to crush us, pulverize and grind us and sling us as bits and pieces through the sultry air? This becomes the great mystery of war; the mystery of living through it. To be slain is to be expected. But to live—that is the marvel of great and deep secrecy.

One air raid—or two—or infrequent air raids can be accepted philosophically. For those who live through them, they can become of great interest, subject of jokes, and a source of danger so remote that there is little fear of it. But pounding from the air day after day, night after night, cannot be laughed away; cannot be ignored, or put aside and forgotten. You can be a target for a day, but not forever.

The realization soon comes that chance itself is operating on the side of Death. Each day of survival is one day nearer Death. It is only a matter of time until you are in the wrong place at the wrong time. It may be a matter of days and weeks and months; but one day, the time will come in an instant of ear-splitting noise when the marching bombs will not step over you, and walk on. On that day, in that final instant, they will convert you into another form of energy, for matter is neither created nor destroyed. And you will become an ant, or a blow-fly, or a cloak of mold—and your soul will have found its freedom in the temperate air.

It is this uncertainty that exposes naked nerves, rubbed raw and bleeding by constant harassment, to dull scissors of gnawing anticipation. Each day these scissors slowly pinch off more of that twitching, exposed nerve, until there are not enough hours in the day to ease the suffering of the mind, or clear it of coming pain, or blot from it the bloody butchery.

An air raid killed my replacement on the aiming circle, Corporal Ralph Gilbert, who took over after I had mislaid the battery and almost wiped out the colonel at Verona. Gilbert was going to headquarters from his artillery unit when a Japanese air raid struck. He fell to the ground without protection, and the marching bombs walked on him. Had I not pointed the artillery in the wrong direction at Verona, Corporal Gilbert would not have replaced me, and I would have been in his shoes. Or would chance have cast the dice in another way? Things such as this make living in a war more strange than dying in one. There is not a man in the First Marine Division who has not wondered why he survived; why it was he . . . and not some kind and good friend.

It was an air raid that finally diagnosed the troubles of Bellflower, our Sleeping Beauty and sage, our preacher and ammunition man.

After the days and nights began to blend into one long, blurred stretch of time, and the air was filled with constant explosions and alarms, the tedious watches of night became a cross weighted with fatigue, the ache of hunger, the strain of mental analysis of every movement and sound. Two men were now on duty at a time. One scanned the sea and beach, one watched the coconut grove. In spite of every effort, the eyes would become heavy and the sentinels would sometimes doze. On one such night, I was awakened by Flint, who informed me in disgust that Bellflower had not only dozed by the cannon, but was now filling the night air with peaceful snores. I struggled to my feet, glad a Jap had not awakened me, and crept out to Bellflower. Sure enough, Flint was right. Before me, comfortable on the sand, stretched Bellflower. He was in a profound sleep; a sleep I devoutly wished I were in—relaxed, oblivious to the world and its conflicts.

I bent over him and removed his bayonet, drew the blade from its scabbard, and placed it across his throat.

I turned to Flint. "Let him sleep. When he wakes up, maybe it will dawn on him the Japs could have hacked off his thick head while he snored."

Flint laughed softly. "It'll scare him to death. It would me, I know."

"He'll be too thick to know what happened," I said, still angry with Bellflower for doping off on watch.

The next morning I discussed the situation with Bellflower. "Do you want to get us all hacked to death in our sleep?" I asked him.

"Naw," he said.

"What came over you; don't you get enough sleep? Why don't you stay awake like everybody else?"

"I just fell out."

"You sure as hell did."

"I didn't mean to. . . . First thing I knowed I was asleep."

"I know it."

"I'm sorry."

"I don't know what to do about it, Bellflower."

"I'm sorry," he repeated, looking completely blank and pitiful.

"The other guys think you don't give a damn," I said. "What if they all did what you did? Nobody would know if orders were bein' followed or not. It would be like a mob. A damn Chinese fire drill, or somethin'."

Bellflower agreed.

"Bellflower, we have been trying to get the new slit trench dug. Why don't you work on that as a real contribution to the war effort for us all?"

"I don't feel so good," he said.

"I don't know why not; you slept all night."

"I just don't."

"After breakfast, dig in the damn slit trench," I said.

I didn't pay much attention to Bellflower after coffee. I didn't feel like looking at him. But I had noticed him fumbling around the slit trench. Around 11 o'clock, Trenton come on the beach and found me by the gun.

"You ought to look at Bellflower," he said.

"Why should I look at that dumbbell?" I asked. "I looked at him all night, and again this morning. Is he still working?"

"No, he's crapped out!"

"Not asleep again?" I was astounded.

"Naw. Sick. He acts like a sick cow. Down on his side and has vomited in the new slit trench."

"Hoof-and-mouth disease, probably," I said. "He'll do anything to get out of work. Maybe it's the crud."

We walked back to the slit trench. Bellflower was down like a sick cow, all right. He also looked somewhat green.

"Are you sick, Bellflower?" I asked.

"Uh-huh," he moaned, barely speaking in a whisper.

"I knew you disliked work, but I didn't know it was this much," I said. I still could not generate too much sympathy for him. But he was a pitiful sight.

"I am goin' to call the ambulance for you, Bellflower," I said. "They pick up bodies in this area after chow. If they aren't too busy, they will come get you right away. Our truck is back at headquarters, an' Lieutenant Rose is off riding around in the jeep by himself."

Bellflower didn't answer.

"Stay right where you are, Bellflower," Trenton said.

"He isn't goin' to go anywhere, Trenton," I said. "See that he doesn't fall in the slit trench."

I called headquarters on the field telephone. They said they would send out and get Bellflower. We got service. In about a half hour, an ambulance peppered with shrapnel holes from air raids staggered into view. The corpsmen loaded Bellflower and took him off.

We got bulletins concerning Bellflower from time to time. He had diarrhea. He was very ill. He had received an enema. He had been given medicine. He had received another enema. He had managed to eat. He was resting well. His diarrhea had ceased. He was up and about. He was sleeping and resting well.

We expected him back, rested.

But this was not to be. Trenton, who had been at headquarters to instruct on mixing concrete for a tent floor to be used for some obscure military purpose, brought the word.

"They have not been able to get Bellflower to take cover for air raids back there," he said.

"I know he's crazy," I replied. "Hasn't he got enough sense to find cover?"

"He says he likes to stand on the airfield and watch the Jap planes come over. He says he never could see 'em good from here because of the trees."

"He likes to stand on the target?" I asked, taken aback.

"Yes," said Trenton.

We both thought about this in silence.

"The major caught him at it yesterday," Trenton said, "and ordered him to dig a foxhole and get in it during air raids."

"That was work," I said. "That's the reason he had rather stand up and gaze heavenward like a goon."

"Bellflower says they never hit the strip."

"Did he dig one?" I asked.

"Yeah. But that's not the half of it." Trenton was grinning; full of the news he was about to give us.

"What did he do?"

"He dug a shallow hole where his shoulders was just an inch or so below the ground, if that much . . . just enough to get him a little below the surface of the ground. And that air raid this morning . . ."

"Did he take cover, or stand out there gawking like a kangaroo?"

"He got in it, all right. The Japs plastered hell out of the field, you know . . ."

"Yeah, I heard 'em . . ."

"But Bellflower had gone to sleep in his hole."

"He didn't get to stand there and watch?"

"Naw, he was asleep. He was asleep when the Japs come over . . . boy, they scared me to death . . . must have been fifty, and high, too . . ."

"I was watching 'em," I said. "But not from the airstrip."

"It's worse there because it is cleared. Bellflower was asleep, and they started dropping bombs, and they was popping every-

where . . . rainin' down . . . and somebody hollered, 'By God, they've got Bellflower,' because he saw this big blast and dirt kicking up right where he was . . . and as soon as they quit poppin', we all run out there to see if we could find anything left . . ."

"You mean he's dead?"

"We run out there and Bellflower was covered with dirt and just raisin' up . . ."

"Alive, but not awake," I said.

"That's no lie," Trenton cried. "It had waked him up . . . But that ain't all . . . Now, this is really it. Bellflower's foxhole edge was not more than five feet from the edge of the bomb crater, not more than that between 'em. It was dirt from the bomb crater that covered up Bellflower . . . and woke him up."

I couldn't believe it. "Looks like the concussion would have killed him."

"Yeah," Trenton said. "If he'd been standin' up, he'd been over half that airfield. They took him to the hospital, but he looked the same."

"Dazed?" I asked.

"Just the same," Trenton said.

"Dazed," I said.

Bellflower slept in the hospital. The doctors, fearing he might have been injured by concussion of the bomb, began to examine him with more than a thermometer. They discovered he had sleeping sickness . . . encephalitis lethargica. He was sick, and had been. It wasn't the real Bellflower we had known; it was the encephalitis lethargic Bellflower. I was sorry for all the mean thoughts I had had about Bellflower. I should have taken him to the sick bay on board ship. But maybe it was better I hadn't. He would have gotten an aspirin, little more. This way he had gotten diarrhea, two enemas, and a chance to get off Guadalcanal. It turned out pretty well for Bellflower.

We never saw him again.

Enemy air raids provided us with news of our wounded—in an indirect way. It was even a novel way. But through them we got a man off Guadalcanal and back again. He told us about our wounded.

Platoon Sergeant Theodore Flume was a dignified blond who had served since the early days of the Great Depression, during which time the Marine Corps was a refuge for many who found themselves starving more rapidly than prosperity could turn the corner. Under such conditions, Platoon Sergeant Flume had thrown himself at the mercy of the Marine Corps, preferring to die fighting rather than by attrition.

The healthy life of the Corps, travel, and lack of pressing responsibilities—for Platoon Sergeant Flume had never married—gave this worthy a philosophical outlook on life and a certain calm which no event, regardless of how threatening, could shatter. He was a great talker given to delivering cultural discourses in the head and was counted among what is known in the Corps as the School of Outhouse Philosophers. The Marines use a more forceful term, really, but such exactitude is not necessary here. He loved nothing so much as to hear himself analyze motives of the Marine Corps, world trends, and fine points of ethics as found in the military. He was a friend of the young Marine, an interesting talker who employed reason rather than bombast. From his lips flowed an unending stream of kindly advice, mature thought, practical views on war and women, all sprinkled with culturally enunciated profanity delivered in such a tone of voice as to make the words sound like erudite Latin phrases one would encounter on a prescription for relief of hematoses piles, the common cold, or glanders.

Platoon Sergeant Flume talked with a steady, calm voice and was always found to be the center of a small knot of Marines, who arrived and drifted away much as a crowd does before a patent-medicine salesman as he lectures on his wares. He offended no one, and was found interesting to most. He was a good teacher, patient, kind, and the complete master of any subject with which he dealt. There were a number of older Marines like him, but none was his equal.

Following a particularly intense air raid, Platoon Sergeant Flume, who was stationed at headquarters, went to the head—an exposed structure of lumber, provided with holes, upon which NCOs of his rank sat. The officers' head was more private, and the lower ranks resorted to slit trenches. But here, in the sanctity of the headquarters area, fine distinctions of rank were still observed. Though higher ratings of NCOs did not have privacy, they did rate a seat. It was to such a seat Platoon Sergeant Flume repaired to remain in studious splendor as he read from a fragment of magazine he had brought with him from the States for this very ritual.

While he was thus occupied, minding his own business and operating well within the boundaries provided by the Marine Corps Manual, Annotated, a group of engineers set to work behind him, where they had located a five-hundred-pound dud, the fruit of the recent Japanese air raid and a threat to the area. The engineers quickly set an explosive charge under the bomb, piled sandbags around it, and cried, "Fire in the hole," as is their custom when about to set off a blast.

Platoon Sergeant Flume remained seated, quietly reading his magazine, a picture of dignity under adverse conditions, exposed to the gaze of common enlisted men of lower rank and to the threat of the enemy, who often lurked in the bushes near headquarters in the hope of killing an officer.

"*Fire in the hole!*" the corporal in charge of the engineers' detail shouted.

Platoon Sergeant Flume did not move.

The corporal walked up to him, saying: "You better get the hell off the can. We're about to detonate a dud."

"What's the hurry?" Flume asked, not looking up from his magazine.

"We got a bunch of others, that's what's the hurry, and this thing might blow by itself, anyway. You better cast off."

"You just wait a goddamned minute," Flume said in his calm, cultured way. "A man don't like to be rushed at a time like this. There ain't no goddamned hurry, and you can wait a goddamned minute."



The corporal was becoming angry; he was tired; his work was dangerous; he wanted to get on with it.

"I'm goin' back to that dud, and if you ain't off the can by then, we are goin' to explode it and you might get blown off that damned seat . . . I can't wait around here all day for you. . . ."

Platoon Sergeant Flume ignored the corporal, flipping a page of his magazine and giving what the corporal interpreted as a Bronx cheer without moving his lips.

"You'll be sorry, by God!" the corporal snarled and moved away.

He walked back to the dud, halted and looked toward Flume, a lonely figure, elevated on his throne beneath the coconut palms.

The corporal turned to his men. "Set it and blow the damned thing. *Fire in the hole! . . . Fire in the hole!*"

The engineers scurried for cover. There was a muffled blast, shrapnel whined and rained from the palms, chipped tree trunks.

Platoon Sergeant Flume picked himself up from the ground. He was bleeding from the hip. Marines ran to him from several directions. A corpsman hurried up.

"Wounded in the butt," the corpsman diagnosed. "It ain't a big piece, but it will have to be cut out at the hospital."

They lifted Platoon Sergeant Flume and helped him walk. He stopped them, and turned. "Get my magazine," he said.

Wounds would not heal on Guadalcanal. They became infected. Instead of the skin growing together, it began to rot, pus formed and unless the wounded were moved out, they risked death a second time.

Platoon Sergeant Flume, along with others who had also received wounds in service of their country, were taken to New Caledonia, where there was a military hospital, and where the Army and the Navy had established headquarters for the United States Armed Forces in the South Pacific. There he was soon repaired. As his stern plates healed, he was placed in charge of a group of walking wounded, all Marines.

These Marines were used to load shipping, some of which

was bound for the Solomons. They were not sick enough to be in bed, but were not well enough to be proper targets for the enemy.

"It was a damn shame," Flume snorted when he returned to Guadalcanal. "These guys were all hurt, shot, some with shrapnel still in 'em, and there they had 'em working like dogs while dog-faces griped about the draft."

We agreed it wasn't right. But, then, the Army wasn't looked upon as a professional outfit and it probably didn't know what to do. Custer's maneuver among the Indians was a good example of Army thinking applied in the field.

"I am glad to get back," Flume growled. "I'd rather go down fightin'."

"Like you done the other time," a private suggested.

Flume glared, forcing back the impudent youth with a withering stare.

"You goin' to move when them engineers tell you to next time?" a small, dirty-faced Pfc asked.

Flume spat. "I'll move when I damn well please. If they had known what they were doin' nobody would of got hurt. I had confidence in 'em—but I've lost it."

"Well, you can tell your grandchildren how you was wounded fightin' Japs at Guadalcanal," a private said.

"They will wonder why you was backin' toward 'em that way," another private needled Platoon Sergeant Flume.

"He can tell 'em he was bayoneted while bendin' over to help a wounded buddy . . . you know, give him a drink out of a canteen like they do in them Westerns."

"Yeah!" the irreverent private said. "Or that he was attacked from the rear."

"Shut up, you damn yardbirds," Flume said. "I ain't taking no Purple Heart for it."

"They don't make one for the area you was hit in, do they?" the private laughed.

Platoon Sergeant Flume stalked off.

"Where you goin', Sergeant?" the Pfc cried after him.

"To the head, by God," Flume shouted back. He walked

a few more paces, then turned toward the laughing group. His face was wreathed in crinkles of mirth. He waved, turned, and walked on.

"He's a damn good guy," the Pfc said.

"He's got guts . . . ain't afraid of nothin'," the private agreed. They watched Flume disappear through the coconut trees.

"It's a good outfit," the private said softly.

"There ain't goin' to be no other one like it," the Pfc agreed. He was right, there never was.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### The Living and the Dead

The dead Japanese soldier decays rapidly in war. This physical disintegration on the battlefield is so swift as to be remarkable, and it attracted my attention.

This is not to write disrespectfully of him, for he could not help it. His soul had gone to wherever it went under the program of Emperor worship in Japan, and the body had only to return to earth. This it did without delay.

The living Japanese never evidenced any respect for the dead patriot of their cause. If they ever provided a burial place for their own, I never saw it. It is true that in encounters with U. S. Marines there were seldom any Japanese left alive, and this doubtless was a factor in their neglect. However, when they had the opportunity to claim their dead, they seldom took advantage of it. Later in the war, they used their dead as booby traps, having learned of the Marines' eagerness to collect souvenirs. A dead Japanese, properly booby trapped, was often a more effective soldier than a live one. Just to be on the safe side, apparently, the Japanese also booby trapped themselves while alive. This made prisoners even more dangerous than Marines considered them to be worth, and served to reduce

the number of living Japanese brought in for questioning. Those who were taken, as a safety measure, were made to strip off all their clothing—and at a safe distance, in case they exploded. The armchair fighter who cries over what he calls inhumane weapons, should come into contact with a booby trapped prisoner, or witness his explosion. It is a very inhumane weapon. Also a very messy weapon. War teaches that people are more juicy than most civilians suspect. Human bombs demonstrate this truth dramatically and convincingly.

The impression Marines got during long experience with the Japanese in the field was that they gave little thought to their own dead. In fact, most Japanese were more concerned with fatal banzai charges, suicide rituals, and other dramatic forms of self-destruction than they were about what Americans generally regard as “a decent funeral.” The enemy preferred the messiest form of death and willingly threw himself into the cannon’s mouth with full knowledge the only result would be total dismemberment. Certainty of death did not slow him. Once a group of Japanese started a forward movement it stopped only when all were dead, or so near to it they could do nothing more. The Japanese Army fought as the army ant fights—by sheer weight of numbers pushing forward regardless of the obstacle; or by digging under the earth and staying there until slain. It is a frightening tactic and always an act of desperation.

Following the first major assault against Marines on Guadalcanal by Japanese troops on August 21, 1942, the beach and sandspit over which the battle had raged were littered with bodies of the enemy. This attack came at night at the Tenaru River, when the Japanese engaged the Marines by trying to cross the river and overwhelm the American defense line. This bloody, frenzied night struggle involved an estimated six to seven hundred Japanese and a thin line of Marines who were established at the Tenaru much as we were near the Matanikau River and the beach of that area. We were on one end of the beach. In the opposite direction, to the east of us, were

the Marines guarding the Tenaru River. Several miles separated us.

The Japanese charged into 37-mm cannons firing canister, absorbed automatic weapons and small-arms fire, and even overran some of the guns. But the effort was a complete failure in that the Marine line held and the Japanese lost everyone, with the exception of fifteen prisoners, thirteen of whom had been hit, taken by the Marines. The Marines lost thirty-four killed and seventy-five wounded.

Due to the rapid decay of the Japanese bodies, the presence of around seven hundred of them created a major problem in sanitation. It was a matter of considerable importance to get them buried as quickly as possible. This was done.

At first, I thought the rapid breakdown of the Japanese after death was due to conditions I have described on Guadalcanal: the warmth, dampness, multitude of insects, and varieties of bacteria and mold. But later observations on Iwo Jima, where climatic conditions, insect and microscopic life were different, the same situation presented itself.

So, the question arose in my mind—and in the minds of other Marines, who noticed the same thing—as to why the Japanese body reduced itself with such fevered energy.

We were never able to answer this question. We weren't scientists. But the phenomenon appears to be little-known outside battlefield conditions; that is, few civilians know about it. Many of us discussed the mystery. But as the war progressed the same condition was observed so often, it came to be an accepted fact and ceased to be of as much interest as it was to us on Guadalcanal, where we first discovered it.

Rapid generation of gas in the tissues causes the dead Japanese to bloat quickly. A small-size Japanese killed in battle will, within a few hours, swell in such a way as to make his size considerably larger. Before this process has continued long enough for the skin to split and liquefied fats to discharge, he gives the uninitiated observer an appearance of tight-skinned muscularity. This leads to the incorrect assumption he is heavier and stronger than he actually was in life.

As the hours pass, however, the stomach of the body swells greatly, as does the face to a lesser degree, and soon splits with long, fairly wide gashes. The mouth is usually open. From it the tongue protrudes and enlarges. The eyes rise from their sockets as the skull, now under pressure of gas generated by bacteria within, slowly cracks open along the sutures to release dark fluids from the brain.

The force of this swelling of the body is such that belts may be broken, clothing split, and buttons popped from cloth.

In the tropic swelter of Guadalcanal, this process was more rapid for all dead tissue than it would have been in Attu, Alaska, for example, where the cold would have slowed bacterial action. The point is, though, the Japanese body accomplished these changes with greater intensity and much more rapidly than one would expect.

All the changes the Japanese dead underwent were normal changes where the body is exposed to open-air conditions—just faster.

Generally, Marines came to the conclusion the rice and fish diet of the Japanese soldier had something to do with the speed of deterioration. It was often suggested the undigested rice caused Japanese stomachs to bloat after death like great balloons. Indeed, this swelling of the stomach was the most striking fact about them, for the abdomen would achieve huge size before exploding. This enlargement began soon after death.

With these changes there came the odor of death. There is no mistaking the odor of human putrefaction. This is especially so in the hot, humid atmosphere of Guadalcanal. It is a revolting, intensely sweet and overpowering stench. The penetrating, concentrated odor produced by bodies in an advanced state of decay triggers the reflex to vomit, an uncontrolled reaction, which in those with a strong stomach results in the dry heaves, and in those who are not thus endowed causes vomiting comparable only to seasickness.

Among the horrors of war, of which there are many beyond the imaginations of those who are against war "because it is so horrible"—the sudden appearance of a severed, naked human

foot directly in front of one, or the plunging into human feces in a shell hole while advancing under fire, for example—the ghastly fumes emitted by the dead lead the list.

Besides the odor, the sight of enemy dead was particularly shocking in the tropics, because of the insects. The savagery of Nature in disposing of the dead is a nightmare best exemplified by the living cloak of flies, black and pulsating and throbbing with a roaring hum that could be heard at a great distance, covering some enemy dead—and the hundreds of columns of huge ants that advanced through this living shroud to penetrate the liquefying mass and disappear on a mission that revolted the imagination.

After Bellflower was taken from the squad by disease, our unit was even weaker than in the beginning, for though he slept a lot, he could be awakened and put to work. With him gone, the squad could still function effectively, but could not afford to lose anyone else. Further reduction of squad strength would put it in a dangerous position, would make the night watches longer and more lonely, and would increase the burden of an already exhausted crew. There was nothing we could do about such things, though. We had to carry on, not because of heroic determination to return to the United States for apple pie, but because we could do nothing else.

It was about this time I was almost slain.

The brush with death—and death was to brush me with almost unnerving regularity as time went on, as it did all of us—did not come as I had imagined it would.

Based upon evidence gathered during the weeks on Guadalcanal, I reached the conclusion I would either be transformed by an aerial bomb, or would be exploded by the more expensive method of naval gunfire. These dangers were greater than small-arms fire we received, for such activity around us was spotty.

I was positive about one thing, too: my death would cost the Japanese dearly, as they never shot anything at me smaller than five hundred pounds in weight.



In these instances, they were not aiming directly at me, personally, but I had begun to assume all rounds fired by them were meant for me. I felt extremely lucky when they did not strike home. After weeks under constant exposure to bursting shells, exploding bombs, raining shrapnel and strafing, war had become a personal affair. The impersonality of combat in the early days of the campaign had melted away as time slowly recorded deaths of men we had known as close, personal, and warm friends.

Guadalcanal had become a problem of survival for us all.

It was a matter of pride to the squad that we had been shot over by more naval vessels than some other squads. We were so located that most Japanese naval gunfire went over our position to explode among other Marines, usually those dug in by the airfield.

We suffered only the initial shots, and sometimes the parting shots. When the Japanese tried to get the range, they fired at the beach. This was unnerving. Knowledge that Japanese eyesight is poor is of great disadvantage at such times. We were always on the edges of our seats, not knowing whether they could see the initial bursts, which were usually in water directly to our front, or just behind us in the coconut trees.

If they did not spot the bursts, they kept shooting until they did. Once the Japs got the range, their naval guns would lift, fire, and shells would pass over our position to crash noisily inland in the headquarters area, on the airfield, and in between.

In night naval gunnery, the Japanese sometimes turned searchlights on the beach, sweeping the area with a bluish-white light, which seemed considerably brighter than it was. They enjoyed using searchlights. If they spied a pile of supplies on the beach, it meant they would try to blow them up. As our transports began slipping in with food and ammunition, braving Japanese submarines patrolling the channel, they were quickly unloaded so they could get out before the subs got them, and the supplies were stacked on the beach. Later the supplies were moved inland by truck, but this usually took two or three days.

Until the supplies were removed, they stood as tempting targets easily seen from the sea. Sometimes these stores were near our gun position, and were usually ammunition, as we were never lucky enough to have food placed that conveniently.

For this reason, we dreaded searchlights. We were not on top of the target, but near it. No Japanese can fire a naval weapon so accurately as to win confidence in such a situation. Few Marines had confidence the squint-eyed slopeheads on a tossing vessel could hit what they actually aimed at. Therefore, there was cause for alarm when supplies were dumped near our position.

Japanese naval shells, when they burst, emit a bright, dirty-yellow smoke. One night, as they were shelling a pile of supplies on the beach, they missed, as was to be expected, and dropped shells around the air-raid shelter the squad occupied. The shells burst with ear-splitting, metallic cracking sounds. Sandbags sprang leaks and drizzled their contents on us. The concussions lifted us from the earth. We were not sitting, as we had no idea how the roof would react to a direct hit. Since it appeared such a test was soon to be made, we tried to get as far down as we could. We were face down on the earth wishing we were twenty feet deeper.

Shells were hitting very close. Thick smoke from their explosions drained along the ground and poured into the air-raid shelter. We gasped for air. Our eyes burned. We had gas masks. Choking, we put these on. They helped.

After the Japanese left—without hitting the piles of supplies on the beach—there were shellholes within four feet of the shelter. The sagging chicken-wire fence was destroyed. Coconut trees were damaged. This was serious; the damage to coconut trees. The soap manufacturers who owned them would claim damages for each tree hit. Marines had been warned not to needlessly destroy these precious things. It was sad to see the Japanese tear them up. After all, the United States would have to pay for that, too.

On the day I was destined to firmly believe I had been shot to death, I was standing in bright sunlight clad in shorts I had

made by cutting the legs off a pair of khaki trousers. I was also wearing a helmet and shoes. This is less clothing than the Marine Corps recommends for warfare, but the people who made those rules were in Washington. It had been a more oppressively hot day than usual, humidity was very high. Dressed in the shorts, I was cooler, or thought I was.

By nightfall, I planned to put my dungarees back on. This was necessary because of the mosquito population, which became very active at sundown. It didn't stop these little bastards from biting, but it did prevent them from standing on bare flesh while they did it.

I was not wearing a shirt, which I usually did when dressed in these rather ragged shorts, because it had suddenly molded, turning a blue-green with orange clumps of fluff scattered throughout. To keep this decorative rot from transferring itself to me, I had sloshed the shirt in the ocean. Now it was drying on top of the air-raid shelter.

With me were Flint and Gleason. Thompkins was off on a mission requiring the truck. Maywell had gone to get the telephone wire spliced. Trenton was cleaning out the jeep.

As we talked, not paying much attention to Trenton, he got his Reising submachine gun and came over near us. I remember looking down at him as he seated himself on the ground to my left and in line with our little group.

"What are you doin'?" I asked him. He did not usually work in the heat of the day, which lasted from sunrise to sunset. Perspiration was pouring from him; he was surrounded by junk from the jeep.

"Cleanin' this damn thing," he said, waving the Reising gun.

"Why?" I asked. Everyone knew this was a useless weapon. The smallest grain of sand would jam the bolt. It took a mechanic to keep it in working order.

"Aw, it might work. Anyway, it's the only thing I can fire and drive a jeep at the same time."

He took out the clip.

In cleaning a Reising gun, this is the first step. It is the same as taking a clip from a pistol.

Trenton then pulled the trigger. As he pulled the trigger, he automatically swung the weapon up, and away from us—all in one motion. This is one safety precaution drilled into Marines. The rule is: Never point a weapon at anyone unless you mean to kill him. This was said so much, and with such force, nobody ever pointed a weapon at someone unless he intended to kill him.

As Trenton pulled the trigger, there was a single “pop.” This hollow sound was characteristic of the Reising gun when it fired its .45-caliber bullet.

I heard the “pop.” At the same time, I felt a burning sensation across my chest, which was unprotected even by thin cloth.

Afraid to look, and fully aware the burning sensation meant I had been struck by the bullet, I grabbed my chest. In the tradition of Hoot Gibson and Ken Maynard of the movies, I said in a calm, low, faraway voice, “He got me!”

I was not calm, really. Inside, I was in a turmoil. I was so shocked, my brain refused to inform me what had happened. It refused even to think about it; it refused to face the realities of the moment, of life or death.

I bent over and just stood.

Everyone else was dumfounded. Flint and Gleason stared at me with wide eyes. I didn’t look at Trenton. A bullet through the chest, I thought to myself, isn’t as painful as I expected it would be. I didn’t feel pain. Just a burning—something like being touched by a hot iron.

I wondered why I had not fallen unconscious, or dead. I still stood, though bent. There was no sensation of weakness. My heart seemed to be strong enough. Too strong. It was working like a sump pump, a device noted for quick drainage.

“Let me see where you was hit,” Flint suggested.

“I’m afraid to move my hands,” I said. And I was.

“I don’t see no blood,” Gleason added.

“You don’t?” This was strange. It was also encouraging. But, then, I was probably bleeding internally. There was no doubt in my mind that anyone so inclined could look through my chest

by sighting along the path of the .45-caliber slug. The hole would be almost a half-inch in diameter, I thought.

"Move your hands so I can see the hole," Flint suggested helpfully.

I thought this over. I couldn't just stand here all day. I hadn't fallen over yet; didn't feel like I was going to. I was still conscious.

Reluctantly, I moved my hands and straightened. I still didn't look. My hands were wet and sticky. I looked at them. No blood. Just sweat, and some dirt.

I looked at my chest. There was a line of small, red dots right across my chest at the level of my heart. The little dots were blood seeping through broken skin. That was all. Just a line of tiny red dots.

Suddenly, I felt weak. Life was very good. I had stood within a half-inch of the next world. I looked at Trenton. He had not moved. Rooted to the spot, Reising gun still clutched in his hands, he was a study in shock. His eyes were wide, filled with horror and fear; his face was blue-white.

"I thought it was un—"

"I know it," I answered. "Everyone always does."

"I'm—I'm sorry—J.C.—Christ, I am . . ."

"I know it." I walked over to him and sat down. "We are both scared to death . . ."

"What if I'd killed you? What if I hadn't . . ." His hands were shaking.

I was shaking, too. "You got another cigarette?" I asked. He had some American cigarettes. I was going to get one while I could.

"Uh-huh." He offered me one.

I took two. "Don't clean that thing around me any more."

"Okay."

"I'm not goin' through this any more. If it had been anybody else, I'd thought they were tryin' to kill me . . . You sure you weren't trying to rub me out? . . . Are you nursing a grudge, or something?"

"Naw . . . sure enough, now . . . we're friends . . ."

"I can tell," I said.

"It ain't funny."

"I'm not laughing."

"You should turn in for the Purple Heart," Flint, who was a collector, said.

"It don't count if you are shot by friends," I said. "It's motive that counts. The Japs are trying to kill you, so to spite 'em the Corps gives guys they hurt medals. But if a friend shoots you . . . well, it isn't right, so they court-martial him."

"Great God, I hadn't thought of that!" Trenton cried. "Don't tell anybody, damnit."

"We won't," I said. "But if you want to do right, you should pay for the bullet . . . you wasted it."

"They say Sunny Jim had to sign for all this equipment before he left the States. The general's responsible for all this stuff," Gleason said.

"Us, too," I said.

"All I say is he's goin' to have a hell of a bill when he gets back to Washington," Trenton growled.

"That's why you haven't been paid since you been here," I said. "He's taking it out of your check . . . and mine."

We thought about this in silence. There had been a lot of destruction. I was glad I hadn't been destroyed. "It just occurred to me . . ." I said, pausing.

"What?"

"I think I'll wear a shirt from now on."

Trenton agreed. "It would be more protection . . . you're right."

I went to the air-raid shelter. Got the shirt. There were some spots of a different color mold on it. But not many. I put it on.

From then on, I always wore a shirt when I wore the khaki shorts. I don't know why, but I felt much safer.

As the months dragged by on Guadalcanal, disease began to put more men out of action than the efforts of the Japanese. Even the most intensive battle on the island, The Battle of the

Ridge, an all-out effort by the enemy to regain Henderson Field, did not do as much damage as disease.

Malaria was the number one enemy. It was present in all its forms. The milder type seemed to have gotten around to everyone. And the degree ranged to malignant malaria. In this serious disease, the attacks of malaria follow one after another. The body grows emaciated. The skin becomes yellow with jaundice. The bloodstream teems with malarial parasites munching red corpuscles.

Transmitted by the hordes of mosquitoes on Guadalcanal, malaria was no respecter of persons. It struck. It struck often. I was fortunate, getting only a mild form. But Trenton was stricken with the worst type and was very ill.

Diarrhea was another plague. It threw men to the ground in vise-like pain of intense stomach cramps, profuse discharge from the intestines, and severe vomiting in which spasms of the stomach would not cease.

Flies, we thought, must carry this disease. Worst of these were the great sluggish creatures that must have been of Japanese origin, as they would plunge to their deaths in food even while it was being lifted to the mouth.

No Marine ever tried to keep count of how many flies were eaten each meal because of this. But the number must have been tremendous.

Many Marines got into the habit of flicking flies with one motion of the spoon and following this with a second movement that brought food to the mouth. It was a rapid sequence of hand and spoon movements. This flick-bite, flick-bite method had merit. But only if it stayed in the right sequence. Once out of sequence—with flies landing during the bite, rather than the flick—a number of insects were chewed and swallowed before adjustments could be made.

The larger flies were the stickiest.

They were very sluggish and appeared to be overweight. We could understand this, for they ate constantly. About half the size of a large bumblebee—and built the same—these greedy

insects were foolhardy in their drive to walk on food. They seemed to be propelled by blind instinct to walk in the gooiest portion of the meal. Many Marines believed this mad desire of the flies to walk barefoot in steaming, soupy mush contained in a mess kit was of sexual origin. Their reason for this theory was the flies had no time to mate, as they were running up and down in our food. They didn't seem to do anything else. Though I did see two attempt to mate in mid-air just before falling into a canteen cup of water and drowning.

While food was heating, these fat flies usually died in the fire as they attempted to reach the container. Sometimes they did reach the pan, but died as they landed on the food. But once efforts were made by Marines to eat the food, the flies moved in heedless of death in any of its forms.

These large flies enjoyed food at the same temperature Marines ate it, whether hot or cold. Hot drinks, such as the landing ration bar cocoa, invariably killed them when they fell in. It was a simple matter to scoop them out. They floated briefly before sinking. Sometimes, they would give a pitiful knee jerk or two as they submerged. On other occasions—but infrequently—they would attempt to land while still in a dive, hitting the surface of the cocoa with a tiny splash, their momentum carrying them straight to the bottom.

The cocoa drinker had to be alert, else a number of these plump flies would be drowned in his cup and be resting at the bottom, boiled to death, or drowned. Since the last sip or two of this drink was the most precious, due to the undissolved sugar—if any sugar was to be had—the only reasonable thing to do was to hold them back with a finger along the cup rim, allowing the cocoa to escape into the mouth, but not them.

Lumpy cocoa was a sure sign of inattentive cooking. Either the cocoa had been taken from the fire and set down to cool without protection, or it had not been drunk quickly enough, once cooled.

These flies did not taste too bad. Many Marines got to the point where they had rather eat them than fight them. Mixed



with other food, they were difficult to detect by taste. But I objected to wing flutters in my mouth. I was never able to continue chewing any portion of food that fluttered. Especially if it fluttered and stopped just as my jaws closed.

Guadalcanal rot, as it came to be known, was an athlete's foot type of thing which attacked any portion of the body. In its most simple form, it was an oozing blisterlike eruption between the toes. This blister had extremely small white dots. When it broke, other blisters were formed. Thus, it spread, itching all the while.

Marines who did nothing about it but scratch, carried it to their hands and other parts of their bodies. But assuming it remained on the feet and spread there, it would slowly turn the foot into an oozing, moist, rot, exceedingly difficult to cure and quite capable of advancing to the stage where the victim could not walk and was in an agony of itching.

This living rot was dreaded by all Marines. Many contracted it, and a number had it in its most advanced and worst stages. One NCO I knew had to be carried aboard ship on a stretcher. Guadalcanal rot had covered both feet and there was some discussion as to whether or not amputation would be necessary.

I had a small spot appear on my foot after we left Guadalcanal. I got it treated aboard ship. It cleared up in a few days. The treatment for it consisted of soaking feet in potassium permanganate, a beautiful purple-colored disinfectant.

But Marines who became infected early in the campaign didn't know what it was. They scratched and scratched—and the Guadalcanal rot spread and spread.

A type of fungus, Guadalcanal rot became famous among Marines. Many who know nothing else about the island know about Guadalcanal rot. The term came to mean any foul skin condition, and its meaning slowly broadened to describe any illness of a nasty type.

The disease deserves its fame. I know of nothing more difficult to cure, more crummy to have, or more easily spread. In many ways Guadalcanal rot symbolizes that island, its climate, its environment, its ability to grow on one.

The Ridge was about a mile inland from Henderson Field. It ran southeast-northwest, poking up from the jungle floor with slopes draining into the Lunga River on the west and the Tenaru River to the east. Deep gullies, filled with lush tropical growth entangled into a wall of vegetation, pocked both sides. It marked the southern line of Marines. To crush this defense meant the Japanese could sweep to Henderson Field, there destroy supply dumps and lay waste the nerve center of American arms on the island.

The battle started September 12, 1942, about 9 P.M.

Our squad and other forces facing the sea, with the Ridge at our backs about two miles away, were put on full alert around dusk.

The Japanese in the underbrush on the far side of the Ridge had been giving indications of a planned assault. Marines along the top of the miserable, twisting landmark had heard much movement, threshing about and voices of the enemy hidden somewhere down in the twisted mass of trees, vines, and bushes.

Japanese naval vessels had been detected approaching the island. With the enemy restless at the Ridge, and with naval support approaching, the possibility that a landing from the sea, an assault at the Ridge and attacks on the flanks would soon take place was very near and very great.

Marines were in a delicate situation: low on supplies, low on manpower, encircled and tired after more than a month of living in foxholes under steady Japanese fire, they were, at the same time, far from beaten. Yet, even though they had been the aggressor on August 7, they now were defenders in defensive positions and without powerful support on the sea and in the air. The Battle of the Solomons had long ago—with the major defeat of the U. S. Navy in August—settled down to a test of endurance, guts, and good fortune.

Marines knew the Japanese, if they so desired, were quite capable of engaging on four fronts. Indeed, if the most dour view were taken, they could engage on five fronts, for they dominated the sea and the air. Seaborne artillery is highly mobile, highly effective. The Japanese had it. Their warships

could practically brush the beach as they fired. Air cover is of great advantage to the side that has it. Enemy planes can pin down units and cut them to pieces.

Though those of us on the beach knew a battle was in the making inland, we knew also we were perched as Cossack posts before any incoming wave of boats filled with Japanese, should they decide on an amphibious landing in conjunction with a push from the interior. In this case, Marines would be fighting back to back in a narrow trap from which there was no escape. There was no escape simply because there was no place to go.

A spotter float plane from a Japanese cruiser appeared shortly before 9 P.M. and passed over our position, heading toward the Ridge. It flew around for several minutes, then dropped a flare over Marine lines atop the Ridge, lighting the area with a flickering blue-white light we could see. With the appearance of the flare, the Japanese cruiser opened fire with its 8-inch guns, hurling shells over our position. These missiles moaned through the night and burst along the Ridge and on the airfield.

We could see the Japanese vessel. With each volley, it lighted up with a reddish-white display as its big guns fired high explosives toward Guadalcanal.

Several times during the night, we were called by field telephone to determine if we had seen any indication of a landing force. We were happy to report we had not.

With the flare from the Japanese plane, which continued to fly around and spot the naval gunfire, the enemy in the jungle beneath the Ridge advanced and engaged Marines in a bloody conflict, often a hand-to-hand struggle, which lasted throughout the night. The Marine units on the Ridge, fighting much larger numbers, were pushed back. With daylight, infantry units in our sector were pulled off the line and sent to reinforce Marines on the Ridge. Many of these men were unable to reach positions on the Ridge because of intense Japanese aerial activity, for with the coming of daylight, the enemy mounted a continuous air raid and strafing run. Japanese naval vessels shelled Henderson Field and the Ridge all during September 13.

The situation was grim all over. The squad was informed by

field telephone the Japanese would probably try a landing that night. We were to hold. We were to report by telephone when we spotted such an amphibious effort, then fire upon the enemy until they had either been wiped out, or we were overrun. A second line of resistance would be established, if we reported attack, by Marine infantry behind us.

This was not happy news. We had two battle possibilities. Either the Japanese would kill us, or—if they swept by—we would be killed in a cross fire. The only hope, as far as I could detect it, was for the Japanese to fail to attack with an assault landing from the sea. This was a possibility so remote it did not seem worth considering. The slopeheads appeared to have us. They would be worse than stupid not to launch a coordinated attack with the sole purpose of killing everybody and ending their loss of face in the Solomons.

Needless to say, we viewed the sunset on the night of September 13 with particular interest. I was convinced it would be the last one I would observe. At the same time, I had a great yearning to see several more. But I felt no fear, only a vague feeling of depression similar to that one feels upon separation from friends at the beginning of a long, dangerous journey.

The squad was a quiet, solemn group; lonely. The gun positions were so spaced we could not stand at one and see the next. We dreaded the darkness; yet we wanted it to come; we wanted it to spend itself; we wanted with all our hearts to see a new day, and if this terrible cross was to be ours on this night, we did not wish to delay—to prolong—the weight of it, or the pain of it.

If the line on the Ridge broke, and if Japanese poured through, we would be faced with confusion. For the Japanese would infiltrate behind us, and, in the darkness, we would not know friend from foe. These thoughts occupied our minds as we sat by the little gun facing the open beach and the sea and the limitless stretch of sky.

With darkness, all hell broke loose on the Ridge. We divided our attention between the sounds behind us and study of the waters before us. The night dragged on; the noise grew. Our

artillery set up a thunderous barrage, firing so rapidly the separate discharges blended into a machine-gun sound. Such artillery fire had never been heard by us before. The pieces sounded very much like pom-pom guns, only deeper and louder in tone and volume.

This was a night of uncertainty for all Marines. The Japanese concentrated on the Ridge, but they also fought on the flanks, too, making attacks on the east and west. But this firing was lost in the artillery roar, in the Japanese bombardment and in the drum roll of small-arms fire.

By daylight, the Japanese were beaten. There was scattered action into the day, but the back of the assault had been broken in the wild night.

In all this struggle, our positions on the beach remained silent, watchful, unassailed.

"They are afraid of us," Gleason said.

"Shut up," I answered, "You might give 'em ideas."

It would be more than foolish to say we were sorry. We were not. We were glad. We were glad they had not hit us. If they had, we would have been dead.

After the Battle of the Ridge, it was estimated four thousand Japanese had faced four hundred Marines on a front just over one mile long. The Marines had won.

It was in the tradition of the Corps.

We moved farther west, down the beach about a mile, and established a new gun position. This was part of a general movement to place our lines on the Matanikau River. There had been some fighting along the river area. Marines were cleaning out Japanese on our side of that sluggish, cesspool-like body of water so our lines would be along its eastern bank. Any attack that would come, then, would have to cross the Matanikau, giving the Japanese the disadvantage of an open field of fire from Marine weapons.

We still faced the sea. Not far behind us ran a dirt track that served as a road to the Matanikau. To our left, at right angles,

was the river, and at this point was still more than a half mile away.

Our days were now occupied with laying barbed wire. First we dug gun positions in the sand—a warm, unrewarding task frequently interrupted by air raids—then we strung wire. For some reason this did not bother the Japanese beyond the Matanikau. Therefore, we worked in relative peace, but ready to spring into cover at an instant's notice. We strung the maze of wire under direction of Lieutenant Rose. Gun positions we had prepared on the beach were interconnected by trenches and, in general, the plan of defense looked pretty good.

In theory, the wire was strung in such a way the enemy would follow little paths we had fixed for them. These little paths led directly into muzzles of machine guns.

In case of a ship-to-shore assault by the Japanese, we were supposed to bring machine guns through the wire and place them in the prepared positions. As the Japs came toward us, we were to fire upon their boats, shoot at them when they got out of the boats, and then kill any we missed as they ran up the little paths into the muzzles of the guns.

This plan sounded all right when Lieutenant Rose explained it, but I have never been able to explain it to anyone else. It was very difficult for us to get through the wire to the prepared positions. It is not as easy as one might think to move ammunition, machine guns, grenades, and other weapons through wire and sand quickly. In fact, few of us—and we had laid the wire—could find the paths. In view of this fact, we felt the Japanese would be slowed in their advance, if they ever made one.

Behind the wire, at the edge of the coconut trees, we set up the 37-mm gun position, building a wall of sandbags on each side and placing a sheet of iron across the top. This we covered with sandbags. We no longer had an air-raid shelter, so we had to make the gun position serve that purpose, too.

This was our new home. We ate, slept, and suffered right here.

During the stringing of the barbed wire, I got a small scratch

on my hand. One of the barbs stabbed me. It was so small, I thought nothing of it. Several days later, I noticed a streak—a red pencil line—on the inside of my left arm, near the wrist. It looked a bit strange. The thought passed through my mind something had bitten me. I thought no more about it.

The next day, as I was washing my face in a helmet, I noticed my arm again. Now the streak was wider and halfway to my elbow.

Hell, I thought. It's blood poisoning.

I searched for the wound. I found it on the heel of my hand. It was infected. A tiny place about the size of a pencil lead. It appeared so very small to be causing so much trouble. But I had been on this island paradise long enough to realize if I didn't act now to stop the infection, I would not be active much longer.

"Gleason," I said. "Look at this."

He looked. "Blood poison," he said.

"I think so, too."

"You better go to Henderson Field and get something for it."

"Yeah," I said. "I'll go now and try to get back by dark."

I walked to Lieutenant Rose, who was at a gun in the center of our unit, and told him I was going to get my arm fixed. He nodded. I went back to the road and caught a ride on a truck.

The hospital was in a converted Jap building. It was the worse for wear and had been peppered with shrapnel. I was never convinced it was a good idea to put a hospital near the chief target of a battle. But it was none of my business. I found the dispensary and fell in line. Anywhere Marines gather together there is a line. It moves slowly. I was hungry, tired and half-knocked out from lack of sleep. The others were in the same condition. A WPA line would have appeared prosperous compared with us. Ragged dungarees, haggard faces, bandaged feet, bloodshot eyes. We stood.

A corpsman looked at my arm. "Blood poison," he said.

I didn't say anything.

"You'll have to soak your hand in salt water. Here are some

pills." He gave me two large pills. "Come back every four hours for some more pills."

"Every four hours?" I was wondering how I would do that. I tossed the pills into my mouth and swallowed them.

"Uh-huh. Now, go sack in at the tent . . . the one over there." He pointed to a sagging tent nearby. "A guy will bring you some salt water to soak in."

I went to the tent. There were blankets on a board floor. The sides were rolled up. I found a blanket and stretched out on the floor. A corpsman arrived with a pan. He set it down by me. "Keep your hand in this," he said.

I put my hand in the pan of hot, salty water.

Next afternoon, a doctor looked at my hand. The streaks on my arm were about gone.

"You can check out," the doctor said. "But keep taking the pills."

I got up off the blanket on the floor. Our company headquarters was in the area somewhere. I searched for it. It was in a thicket near the Lunga River, which was wide, shallow, and rapid at this point. Not far upstream, the Seabees had built a bridge, a high span resembling a railroad bridge.

Trenton was working the area. He had been assigned to direct some construction. He was glad to see me.

"What you doin' here?" he shouted.

"Takin' pills," I said. "I got blood poisoning."

"Good," he cried. "How long you goin' to be here?"

"A day or two. I have to take pills every four hours."

"There is a platform in a tent near me. You can have that."

He showed me the tent. It was a platform, all right. Somebody had nailed boards together to make a low, long table.

"This is a bed?"

"They ain't bad. Not as soft as sand, but they ain't bad," Trenton assured me. I stretched out on the planking.

"I am not supposed to churn around for a couple of days," I said. I went to sleep.

I took pills for two more days. Nobody told me to stop. I



would report for pills, and a corpsman on duty would hand me two. I asked him on the second day how many more pills.

"I don't know," he said stupidly. "It don't say on this order." He handed me two pills. I took them.

I had been sleeping a lot. The pills made me feel weak, my head roared. I was hungry but couldn't eat. Yet, the change of location and the appearance of a more civilized area gave me a deeper sense of security. It was easier to relax.

After I had been taking pills for three days, I woke up in the middle of the night. My brain was as clear and alert as if I had been awake all the time. I was lying on my back on the board platform. But I sensed something was wrong. I lay quite still. My heart thumped forcefully, then did nothing. After what seemed like minutes, it thumped again, a strong blow against my chest, and that was all.

It's about to stop, I thought, trying to breathe faster to make it speed up. This had no effect. It just thumped . . . waited . . . and waited . . . thumped again.

I made an effort to move my right arm. It was asleep. I tried my left arm. It was asleep. I tried each of my legs in turn . . . they were asleep.

Good lord! I thought. I've got to get up.

With much effort, I raised myself to a sitting position on the boards. My heart began to thump with a little more speed. Slowly, with much needlelike pain, my limbs began to receive circulation.

A great thirst was upon me. As soon as I could use my arms, I found a canteen under the bed, tilted it, and guzzled water like a man dying of thirst.

I got up. Scared. "Damned if I don't think I was about to die from those damn pills," I said to myself.

Next day, I reported to the dispensary. The corpsman tried to give me two more pills.

"I don't want any more pills," I said. "Where is the doctor?"

The corpsman pointed to a man next to him.

I told the doctor about my experience in the night.

"Don't take any more of these damn pills," he said.

"Thank you, sir," I said.

I caught a truck and went back to the squad. The place looked like home. I was glad to be back.

It was a lot safer, all things considered. A lot safer.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### The Gooney Bird Stare

The sound of an artillery shell changes with its height and speed.

If the shell is low and about to hit the earth, it has a tearing sound; if it is higher, but will strike soon, it has a rushing, ghostly cry; if it is absolutely safe, very high and very fast, it leaves behind it a *whish-whish-whishing* sound.

If the shell strikes very, very close, it combines the tearing sound with a metallic scream followed instantly by brittle cracking noises ended by a deafening explosion. Such sounds of a very near miss are in rapid sequence, blended into each other.

These sounds and their analysis become second nature to those under artillery fire. We became conditioned to them. The proper reactions to them became reflex movements done without thinking.

I was standing near a truck one day toward the end of the Guadalcanal campaign when a Marine unloading the vehicle reached into the truck bed and took hold of a wooden box and pulled it toward the tailgate. The box was heavy. On the bottom, it had a bent nail. The Marine heaved on the box and it slid

across the metal truck bed, its nail pressed hard against the steel and there was a metallic scream.

At this sound not one man remained standing. Everyone hit the deck, even the Marine pulling the box. When we realized what had happened, we felt somewhat foolish, but not the least bit sorry we had done it. It had sounded like a close hit by an artillery shell. Our reflex to that sound had not allowed us to think. There usually wasn't time to think. We hit the deck, fast and hard.

The constant danger from falling bombs, and shells from the sea, was increased to an almost insane level on the night of October 13, 1942, when a Japanese battleship arrived. It stood off Guadalcanal quite a distance and we did not spot it from our gun position. But suddenly, without warning of any kind, the sound of a heavy freight train filled the air, the earth shook, there was a series of great explosions and the ground shook again.

"What the hell!" Gleason shouted. "What was that?"

We were confused. Our brains could not sort out so sudden and complex a problem. The night was very black. At first, we thought the Japs across the Matanikau River were launching an attack. But, if they were, they must have broken out a secret weapon.

"Where'd it come from?" Flint asked in an awed voice. "I didn't see any flash."

"I didn't hear anything before, either." I said, looking toward the ocean.

Gleason had taken his position at the gunsight. "You see anything out there?"

I strained my eyes against the darkness. At that instant there was a giant explosion at sea, as though an entire ship had been blown to bits, and the ground shook as the dirty, red-yellow flash ballooned toward Savo Island. The air was filled with sound, sandbags in our gun position began to leak, then the earth rocked with great explosions.

"Look! You see that?" I cried. "It's a ship . . . they're coming from a ship."

"We ain't never had no ship shoot like that!" Maywell said in a strangled voice. "Great God."

The billow of light flowered again. There was the sound of thunder, rolling summer thunder; the earth shook; the night was filled with the mighty sound of great weight slowing in the air, then the awful, ground-shaking explosions, bouncing us on the soil to which we now clung with sweaty hands.

"That ain't no cruiser," Thompkins said breathlessly.

"It's one of their damn battleships . . . That's what it is . . . No doubt about it, by God . . . A damn battleship . . . The bastards are trying to kill us with a stinking battleship. . . ." Gleason shouted.

The ship glowed again. We pressed against the sand, felt it vibrate as though shaken by an earthquake. In seconds the shells roared overhead, crashed, shook our bodies and filled our hearts with fear.

"You want to shoot back?" I asked, trying to settle my own nerves with an appeal to the absurd.

"You nuts, or something? They'd see this flash and kill us all." Gleason had taken me seriously.

I tried again. "If you sank it, you'd be a damn hero and might make corporal, like me. You'd be rich and could afford to marry one of those cannibals in New Zealand."

He grunted with disgust.

I looked toward the ocean. The ship was aflame again. The elevation had lifted. Now the shells were pounding the airfield.

"God help them!" I prayed.

"They are droppin' 'em on headquarters," Gleason said.

"They ain't goin' to live through that . . . they just ain't goin' to. Nothing can live through that . . . nothin' by God," Thompkins groaned.

I was afraid he was right. The barrage continued. Evidently they were firing broadsides. Several shells were coming over at a time. We could tell by the explosions. They were separated by fractions of seconds.

For more than an hour this pounding went on as the battle-

ship cruised slowly, leisurely, calmly before our eyes. It seemed it would never stop. The visit seemed an eternity.

Next day, we were almost surprised to learn Marines in the Henderson Field area had survived. But they had. They had crouched in their air-raid shelters, the earth shaking and tossing, the air filled with blasts of doom, and huge, flying chunks of metal from the 14-inch shells.

Frenchy, a short, wiry, excitable friend from boot camp days, told me later what had happened to him. He had been in old Platoon 133 with me, and he greeted me like a lost brother.

"Let me tell you what happened to me . . . It was God's will," he said.

"I want you to. I heard you almost got it."

"Almost! It was just one of them things, let me tell you. I don't understand it. God was watchin' over me. He protected me! It was God's will, I tell you. I can't explain it. Don't understand' it . . . I get scared thinkin' about it."

"What happened?" I asked. I had heard some of it, but I wanted to hear it from him. I liked to hear Frenchy talk. He was a resident of Maine. A fisherman.

He turned and threw away a cigarette, then looked at me again. His face was very serious. "When we heard the big noise, we didn't know what to think. We knew it was somethin' different . . . ha, unusual . . . big! But we didn't know what. When we heard 'em hit, we thought this . . . I am a stranger to this area, you see. I was caught in it . . . You know how it is? You know how they got the holes?"

I grunted. I knew. There were plenty of holes, covered air-raid shelters and foxholes. All dug by different people at different times. Holes that didn't belong to any particular group. Some Marines used the same air-raid shelter and got used to it, and used it every air raid, but they hadn't built it, so it wasn't theirs. It was a first come, first served basis. There were favorite places, but nobody had any real claim on any one place. The area had transients—lot of them, and the holes were for everybody.

"You know!" Frenchy waved his hand. "I don't have no air-raid shelter, you see, because I'm not of that area. I have no hole

to jump in. I don't know where the best one is. I figure . . . uh . . . I say to myself, 'Oh, a friend, he'll let me use his place.' I wasn't worried . . . but I was in a hurry . . . You bet I was!"

I indicated I understood, fished for a cigarette and lighted it. Everybody knew the sense of panic and urgency when trying to locate cover, especially in a strange area. It was a feeling of complete confusion. But Frenchy would tell it in his own way and get more excited all the time, his words running together, ripples of sound.

"I heard the big explosion, an' I took off at high port. Boy, I moved . . . like Blaskewitz say, you know, 'Move out you feather merchant!' Like he tell you, 'Boy, you gotta move.' Boy! I move.

"It was dark. Plenty black because of the trees. I don't know the place. But I learn it fast! Everybody is headin' for holes . . . goin' this way, goin' that way . . . I see a hole . . . and I poke my head in . . . it was full . . . jammed with guys . . . I don't know nobody, anyway; I back out and look around in the dark . . . Boy, I can hear 'em shootin' another bucketful, and here they come."

He popped his palms together, his eyes wide with the memory.

"I say to myself, 'Frenchy, boy, if you don't find a hole, they're goin' to have to dig one for you . . . but you won't know it by then.'"

He grinned. I grinned back. We all knew the helpless sensation of searching for an opening in the earth. Guadalcanal Marines knew this; it was burned into their brains.

"So," Frenchy said, "I run to another hole. This was the second hole I try . . . I got to it an' start crawlin' in, and who should stop me? It's old Red. You know him! That second lieutenant . . . the big one at Parris Island that's got to have all the General Orders all the time—the one who cussed out some of the boys that night . . ."

"I know him," I said. He was always officer of the day when I was corporal of the guard. At least, it seemed that way.

"Well, the lieutenant holds me back and says, 'Frenchy, it's a

full hole! I can tell it is. He isn't far in. Hangin' on the door.

"By now, I'm real scared. I can't spend the night lookin' for a hole . . . I got no hole an' I don't see nobody out but me. I think, What a damn spot for me. I say to the lieutenant, 'Sir, I gotta fin' a spot . . . I ain't got no place and it's gettin' hot . . . I just gotta come insidel'"

"What'd he say?" I asked.

"He was gettin' impatient with me . . . There wasn't no room, I know that, but I was in a hurry, too. He says, 'Look! See that hole over there?' An' I look, but I can't see nothin' very good . . . An' the shells are bustin' . . . the noise is awful big . . . I finally see it, not too far off. 'Yeah, Lieutenant, that one?' I say.

"He says, 'Yes, head for it, they got room . . .' I headed for it . . . boy, they had to have room . . . I was scared . . . It was hot, real hot . . . I got there and crawled in . . . an' it was crowded, but they shoved around and there was plenty of room . . . I'm not a big guy . . . Boy, was I glad . . . I tell you, I was. . . ."

He paused for breath. I handed him a cigarette. "Frenchy," I said, "what happened next?"

"I hadn't been there long . . . a minute, I guess . . . maybe a little longer or a little less . . . it wasn't long . . . when, boy, there was a blast . . . a great big blast . . . I tell you, it almost caved us in . . . it shook us up, and it was terrible . . . such noise . . . an' so near. I thought, Frenchy, boy, you don't know how lucky you are; you are just in time . . . nick of time!"

He stood silent, thinking of the night of horror; remembering the flying steel and crashing tons of explosives. Then, he began again, his voice more solemn, lower.

"God saved me," he said. "You know what? Well, when it was over we pulled out . . . crawled up to see what was left. I thought, I better tell Red I found a place. You know what? One of them shells had hit that place . . . direct hit . . . right in it . . . six or eight guys and Red . . . Nothin' left. They didn't find nobody . . . Nothin'! Cleaned out! Just a big hole. Nothin'



left of those guys . . . boy, it had gone right in there an' exploded."

He shook his head from side to side. "I can't understand it. It just wasn't my time. I wanted in there . . . I didn't care if it was full . . . I wanted in there . . . God saved me. If I had been in there, boy! An' what really gets me, you know, really gets me . . . I wanted in there . . . wanted in that hole real bad."

"You never know, Frenchy," I said. "It's very strange . . . a strange feeling, I know."

"You can say that again. It was God. It was those guys' time . . . not mine."

"I think that's true," I said. "We can't understand those things. We aren't supposed to."

"That's for sure. We just don't know. We'll get it when our time comes."

I put my arm around his shoulder. He was a fine American. "We'll die of the crud in some veterans hospital," I said. "The good die young. You remember what Blaskewitz used to say, 'The good die young an' you bastards will live forever, because you ain't worth killin'.'"

Frenchy laughed. "He told us both that, I remember."

"You can tell him he was right," I said.

We both laughed.

We were glad we weren't worth killing.

The Japanese had been making desperate efforts to wipe us out. They had failed. Every time they launched a vigorous effort to drive us into the sea, they bungled. They did not take advantage of opportunity. They did not work together. Every contact with U. S. Marines proved a fatal error for the Japanese.

They reinforced their garrison.

Hissing with vexation, their stomachs filled with saki in which fish heads floated, their trousers bagging and their teeth protruding, they rushed new troops to Guadalcanal.

We knew this. We watched them unload. It was a commuter run. There were transports pulling in almost every day with fresh Nips, more supplies. All for the glory of the Emperor

astride his white charger: the Oriental Lone Ranger and his Tojo.

But they couldn't follow the script. Every time they would cry "*Banzai*" and charge toward the setting sun, they would run into U. S. Marines and be transformed.

It was sad in a way, for we never hated the Japanese in the sense a government bond salesman did. We had a different feeling about the Japanese. We looked upon him more as a debtor views a creditor: with foreboding, with resentment and some anger. We didn't have time to hate the Japanese. We thought the Japanese were silly jackasses given to depraved acts and profane thoughts of a perverted nature. We respected them as opponents. We could never understand their zeal to die, their willingness to bayonet the wounded, their eagerness to be so wasteful of life.

We didn't love them. We had no intention of negotiating with them. We knew we could make them more thoroughly peaceful, less gluttonous for the world that was not theirs, and more pliable to reason by literally beating hell out of them. We were determined to do this. This is the only way to treat a people who have fallen into the unfortunate belief they are destined to rule the world. A good lead purge always relieves this congestion of the mind, causes reform back in their homeland, and gives them a new outlook on people and things.

We watched the unloading of Japanese reinforcements without qualms. They brought in so many transports, we sometimes wondered what would happen if our supply ships and theirs arrived at the same moment. Often the Japanese did not arrive with as many transports as they had started with—for the U. S. Navy was doing better and better—but they got to Guadalcanal with some. On each was something they could use.

The Japanese chose the Matanikau River area for their camp. This was their base, a few miles west of the Matanikau toward Cape Esperance. Our squad was very near them on the opposite side of the Matanikau and on the beach at the edge of the coconut trees. We could see the Jap ships without eyestrain and very clearly. We watched them as Americans watch new neighbors

move in next door. We watched through binoculars. We watched day and night. They watched us.

They brought in an artillery piece. It was a big rifle and with it they could hit the airfield. They shot it like a pistol; two or three rounds, or a half dozen, and then would quit for the day. On special occasions, they fired longer; but usually they were slow deliberate marksmen.

One afternoon three of us had decided to risk a bath. It meant we had to thread through the barbed wire. Up until that moment, the Japanese had not fired into our area with their gun. They had blown down the Coast Guard house with it, and fired over our heads, but never into our area.

During the past few days an armored tank lighter had floated from the area of the Coast Guard house and beached itself just past our gun position. We had tried to sink it. We couldn't. It was beached. A half track had tried, too. It had failed. We didn't like it, but it was there. We had cursed it, but that didn't sink it, either. We knew the Japanese could see it. It marked our position. We could do nothing about it.

We had worried; it hadn't done any good. The tank lighter just stayed there. Now we needed a bath. We negotiated the barbed wire on the beach. It was a negotiation filled with hazard, but we made it. We waded into the sea, naked, of course, and dirty.

"I don't like this," Gleason muttered.

"Me, either," I said. "But it will be worth it, if we can bathe."

The water got deeper. The sandy bottom had a gradual slope. The sea was warm and quiet. There was never any surf, just ripples of water washing the beach much like a lake. There were humps of coral here and there. We tried to avoid these. Scratches from rough coral got infected immediately.

We looked back toward the beach. There was a lot of barbed wire on it; a thicket of rusty steel. Flint was approaching. He had decided to join us.

"You think there are any sharks down here?" he cried as he entered the water.

We had decided there were no sharks around the Coast Guard

house when we had bathed there. This was a conclusion based on no evidence at all—just that we hadn't been attacked.

"Too shallow," I answered. Actually, I didn't know. But why worry about it after getting in with them?

Gleason was sitting on the bottom. Only his head showed above the water. "Just barracuda. Probably plenty of them."

"Barracuda?" Flint was interested. "What do they do?"

"Eat you," Gleason said calmly.

I sank under water and tried to get several days' accumulation of sand from my hair. It was very nice under water. I opened my eyes. Small colorful fish were swimming in and out of the coral. I stood up.

Flint was watching the ocean floor. He was on one knee, his hands cupped as he peered through the water.

"They travel in schools, a whole bunch at a time," Gleason said.

"They do?" Flint said without interrupting his observations.

"Yeah, they don't take a big bite, either. They just nip you to death . . . nip-nip-nip-nip, an' you've had it. They're fast. They come back for seconds before you know what has hit you."

"I wouldn't just stand there; I'd take off after the first nip." Flint smoothed the water with one hand, then stuck his face under the surface.

"He wouldn't get away," Gleason said to me. "He'd be a skeleton up to the water line before he knew what hit him."

I grunted. I didn't give a damn about barracuda.

We splashed around some. But we were not too happy about being so exposed.

"Let's head in," Gleason said. "We've been out here too long already!"

I agreed. We started moving slowly through the shallows toward the beach.

We heard a muffled report from the Japanese holdings beyond the river. A geyser of water suddenly rose from the sea a hundred feet behind us. There was a gurgly explosion beneath the waves.

"Great God!" Gleason shouted. "The Japs are shootin' that damn gun at us."

It was the five-inch rifle the Japanese had received from Tokyo. I turned just in time to see the splash. The Nips must be firing at the beached tank lighter—but they could be shooting at us instead. The shell had been more in line with us than with the abandoned boat.

All of us started running. There was another watery explosion. Nearer. Louder. The water seemed to be containing the shrapnel. The barbed wire on the beach loomed before us. There was another splash and cracking explosion in the water. I moved toward the wire my feet barely touching the ground. I felt like a fool, dashing through surf and sand in the nude with five-inch shells exploding at my heels.

I didn't slow down as I got to the barbed wire. I cursed it under my breath. I jumped the first strand . . . stepped . . . twisted . . . turned . . . hopped . . . jumped . . . bounded. . . . And I made it through without a scratch. The others were right behind me. I could move very rapidly when the occasion demanded it.

Sand was all over me. I grabbed my dungarees and jumped into them, swept up the web belt and snapped it on, and dived into the gun position, puffing, wet, sandy.

"They're such lousy shots," Thompkins sighed.

"Aw, shut up," I said.

Gleason turned to Thompkins, who was dry and calm. "I'll say one thing: From now on I'm goin' to be as seedy as you are . . . I'm never goin' to bathe again on this island."

"Me, either," I said.

The shells continued to fall. They had moved in closer and were now churning the shallows directly in front of our gun position. If they raised the elevation just a little, the Japs would be bouncing them off our roof. But I didn't think they would bounce; they would come right through.

"I hope they overshoot when they raise up," Gleason said. He was crouched by the gunsight. A shell threw water high in the air just a few feet from the beach.

"Amen!" I said. "It wouldn't do any good to move back into the trees. They might drop the next one there, and we would have had it."

"The Japs think they're dropping them in the boat," Thompkins observed.

It was possible. From the angle of their shots, it would look that way. Their rifle was off to our left front. The shells were falling between our position and the tank lighter. To the Japs, it would look as if the shells were dropping on the boat.

The Nips fired several more rounds. It was a time of extreme tension and prayer. The impact of the shells was barely short of us.

Finally, there was a rush of air and a moan.

"Goin' over," Gleason said.

"Yep!" I answered, much relieved.

We relaxed.

The first contingent of Army troops, who were advance elements of the Americal Division destined to relieve us the middle of December, but who now reinforced our ranks, arrived in October 1942. We had been in the lines about two months and a half by then. To say we were glad they arrived is an understatement; we were overwhelmed with joy.

We thought it served them right.

There is nothing which makes a miserable person happier than to see others achieve the same status. There is a brotherhood in misery not found at higher levels of experience. There is a fraternal feeling of bad will in misery. It feeds on the devout hope others will not only be as miserable, but will sink even lower into the bog of despond from which they are viewed. Only people who have been poor, hungry, tired, and broke can understand this, but there is no desire under these circumstances to rise out of the misery, only the bitter desire to see the newcomer pulled down into it. This is why it is so difficult to help miserable people; they have become blinded with bitterness and only want to see others suffer just as they have.

Marines, then, looked upon the arrival of the 164th Infantry Regiment of the Americal Division in this miserable way.

There were mixed feelings, of course. These are the only kind of feelings people ever have, anyway; but our feelings were more mixed than usual. We were anxious to transfer the island to the hands of the U. S. Army. Long ago, we had decided the capture of the airport and the holding of it for months was enough to expect of so thin and ill-equipped a force.

We were ready to suffer the dangers of barrooms we still remembered, and to face the slings and arrows connected with civilized life. We looked forward to eating a decent meal and sleeping in safe comfort on a bed. The matter of eating had become a passion. Eggs were especially dreamed of, talked about and relished. The time came when fried eggs could no longer be mentioned. The thought was too painful and created a murmur of gripes about the present menu. It caused emotional breakdowns to talk about fried eggs, bacon, or hotcakes.

We watched the soldiers unload. They were to be mixed with Marine units on the line to get the benefit of Marine experience with the enemy. We got no soldiers in our area, but we knew other soldiers would come, and when they did, we would leave.

The arrival of fresh American troops disturbed the Japanese, who made their welcome a day-long air raid, submarine attack, and a climactic night shelling by naval units.

Marines who had been painting Japanese Rising Sun flags on scraps of cloth redoubled their efforts. These choice items of fraud were mere red circles on scraps of cloth. When the paint dried, the hollow-eyed, bitter, and greedy artists bayoneted the imitation flags a number of times and walked on them to give them a battle-scarred appearance. Master craftsmen sometimes poured spoiled coconut juice on the product to give an authentic odor-of-carnage-in-the-jungle, a fragrance admirably conveyed by this revolting liquid. More expensive flags were larger and included Japanese script laboriously copied from enemy canned goods. Some of these were "aged" in slit trenches, then dried quickly in the tropical breeze.

In the past, sales of such souvenir items had been restricted to sailors who manned supply ships which made brief visits to our shores. With the arrival of the Army there was a certain urgency. Money once again was beginning to have value, whereas in the past it was considered worthless and would buy neither food nor cigarettes. Since relief could not be far away, it meant liberty could not be far behind that; and liberty meant money was needed.

Therefore, Japanese flags manufactured by hard-bitten, emaciated and depraved Marines began to flow from little factories in the bullrushes. Sales were brisk for a time. Many American homes, no doubt, treasure these souvenirs. It might be a good idea to have the script translated, if you have one of these flags. It should read either "Pineapple," "Meatballs" or "Fish." However, occasionally other terms were copied.

While we observed the unloading of soldiers, one of their transports suddenly threw its engines full speed ahead. This is not a normal way to start a transport. The screws churned a column of water into a froth as they frantically tried to get the vessel under way. The ship gave the appearance of a frightened elephant.

The transport was parallel to the beach, down from us with its starboard side and stern in our view. At first, we couldn't understand the commotion. We watched, perplexed. Then we saw it: a line of white foam bearing down on the ship; a white streak in the blue-green water. The line of white passed under the fantail of the vessel, missing the stern by only a few feet, and bore down on the beach.

"*Torpedo!*" someone cried, pointing at the streak. As we watched, amazed by the fact we now had been shot at by a torpedo—which made the list of naval weapons used against us by the Japanese complete—the long metal, cigar-shaped missile skidded through the shallows and slid over the sand, still pointing directly inland. It didn't explode. It lay there, wet, sleek, deadly, its little propeller turning wildly.

At sea, destroyers churned about like water beetles, zig-zagging frantically, throwing depth charges in all directions. We



watched intently, hoping they would hit the Jap sub. Drumbeats of the underwater explosions vibrated the sand upon which we stood.

Suddenly, the black body of the submarine broke water, and slowly rose, dripping from the liquid sea, foamy water pouring from its sides, its bow rising to the sky. The bow went up and up and up until the Japanese vessel seemed to stand on its tail. It was a pen dipped in the surface of the calm water. We shouted with victory as it began to slide straight into the deep, dropping like an arrow into the gloom of the South Pacific.

Guadalcanal developed what came to be known as the Gooney Bird Stare. This symptom of mental breakdown was named on Guadalcanal. Every Marine became an expert in recognizing it.

Constant exposure to danger, bad diet, hunger, months on the line without relief, caused some degree of neurosis in every Marine—irritability, swift and extreme reactions to noise, inability to sleep but for short catnaps, obsession with some subject—such as fried eggs—and numerous other manifestations of mental torment and physical exhaustion.

The Gooney Bird Stare began to appear when the mind was quite near the edge of outer space, ready to topple over into unreality. It was characterized by wide-open, bloodshot eyes, showing the whites all the way around the pupils, raised eyebrows, wrinkled forehead, and complete inattention. A Marine with the Gooney Bird Stare appeared completely, utterly, exhausted, his eyes blank and without expression. His mind was far away, distracted, occupied with some problem outside reality, such as fried eggs. He had cast aside the world and had entered another for long periods. He quit conversing, preferred to be alone, did not like to be bothered and sat in silence for long stretches of time.

The Gooney Bird Stare did not come all at once. A Marine did not suddenly have it. It came by slow, subtle changes over a period of time. At first, it was mere inattention; brief day-dreaming. The victim was unaware of events around him, was not interested in anything, and was wrapped in his own

thoughts. When he did talk, his conversation centered about one subject, which he discussed constantly, repeatedly, and from every possible angle. If it were fried eggs, he complained that there were none, described how he liked them cooked, complained about what he had to eat, and slowly became angry about it.

As time went on, his periods of daydreaming would grow longer, he would grow unable to keep his attention on any thing long, and would begin to operate like a robot. All the while, his eyes were opening wider and wider for longer and longer periods of time. These unblinking orbs, bloodshot, unmoving, began to dominate his face and were the sole expression reflected upon it. Smiles and laughter were gone for good. The face began to have a sadness that was deep; an unconscious reflection of grief and mental absenteeism.

Many Marines got the Gooney Bird Stare in some degree or other without plunging off through the brush in an unreasoning charge that marked the complete crack-up. But those who got the Gooney Bird Stare and kept it for a while, soon cracked up.

This expression of the face marked extreme mental and physical fatigue. A fatigue that had reached a point of saturation. It marked the beginning of the end of the controlled mind. It marked a nervous breakdown.

The Gooney Bird Stare became a good warning symptom of battle fatigue, showing the man needed rest for a while, then he was as good as new—or almost new, anyway.

Marines did not laugh about the Gooney Bird Stare. Too many brave men, who had risked their lives day after day, month after month in the service of the Corps, developed a wide-eyed, blank look after some especially severe assault against the enemy. They had been pushed to the wall of endurance. The horrors they had inspected so intimately were beginning to show in their own eyes.

Toward the end of the Guadalcanal campaign all of us were in a state of extreme fatigue, malnutrition, and disgust. We had lost our emotions for happiness and enthusiasm. Contrary to the Hollywood concept of men's thinking after months of battle, our

thoughts turned around a very narrow field, the center of which was food.

We did not have the slightest idea of what was going on in the world. We got no lectures on world developments or who we were fighting, or why—we all had sense enough to know why we were fighting. We saw no magazines or newspapers. We received no pinups, were not entertained by anyone but the Japanese—and they made it interesting enough. There was a radio at headquarters, but we seldom got any information concerning what had been received on it.

There was nothing to distract us from the business at hand. We lived in holes in the ground for four months and eight days. We were shot at by some Japanese weapon all the hours of that time. Each man was brushed by Death not once, but many, many times.

In view of these hardships, some men got the Gooney Bird Stare. I was astonished all of us did not succumb, but we didn't. It takes longer for some than for others. In fact, most of us didn't succumb, which is a credit to Marine Corps training methods. It took us a long time to tell the difference between the training methods and actual warfare; there was some change, but not too much. By the time we had figured it out, the campaign was almost over. Living conditions on Guadalcanal were little different from those in Verona, North Carolina. Some of the natives looked the same. In reality, living conditions were better, because it was warm. The food tasted about the same; there just wasn't as much of it. Many people acted the same.

Those who got the Gooney Bird Stare on Guadalcanal would have gotten it at Verona, if we had stayed there long enough. Some had the Gooney Bird Stare when they enlisted. But this was their normal expression and they never cracked up.

By the time our relief did come we looked like beggars clad in rags, weak, exhausted, without a care in the world, for we did not care—we did not give a damn.

We had beaten the Japanese. Now we just didn't give a damn. Values we once held—things we once thought so important—

no longer meant a thing. Now we knew how little it takes to live; now we knew how much men can do with very little, if they have guts and do not give a damn.

We knew toughness was more of the mind than of the body. We knew if the mind resolved to do it, the body could do it.

So, we looked with tired, cynical eyes at the sea. Nothing could hurt us now. We had nothing but our lives. And we didn't give a damn.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### Ragged Dragons

We sat in the sand near the Lunga River and under the shade of the coconut trees. With us was everything we owned: full combat packs with horseshoe rolls.

We wore ragged clothing. Threadbare, faded dungarees with frayed cuffs; dented helmets with dirty liners stained by sweat; filthy shoes, the rough leather, black with saddle soap, worn and scarred. These were our uniforms. These were our work clothes.

The Marines dressed thus for travel were thin, hollow-cheeked, gaunt of frame. Their faces were burned a deep bronze and their eyebrows were bleached by the tropical sun; their hair was ragged with crude barbering. Eyes that not so long ago danced with merriment of youth were now cold, hard, and merciless, quick to freeze in anger.

The faces, deep lines on the foreheads and at the corners of the eyes, were a picture of exhaustion of mind and body. Yet, they still reflected a fierceness, a starved fierceness, taunted and made mean and impatient by circumstance.

Everyone wore packs, easing the weight by leaning back slightly so the bottom section would rest against the sand. A few Marines sat at the bases of coconut trees, leaning against the

rough trunks, legs sprawled, hands clasped in their laps, as they slept in the heat.

Several, who had decided to drink their stock of fermented raisin juice, were singing. They sang well. The others listened, bloodshot eyes sweeping trees and underbrush and sky from long habit. The singers were happy; they sang loudly. It was a song they had composed about Guadalcanal. We were happy, too, but we could not sing. We did not have the inclination, or the energy, or the raisin juice.

For long periods the weary eyes looking from shadows of sunken eyesockets fixed upon the transport anchored in the channel. Our transport. So near, yet so far away, still. It stood off Lunga River, but well out from the beach. It was waiting for us. We were awaiting the "Word." We were leaving Guadalcanal, for the substance of our dreams had now taken form and weight and reality, and stood before us, floating on the smooth, warm sea. Our burning eyes could not drink in enough of the sight—this precious scene of the transport standing offshore awaiting us.

We were almost afraid to think of it too much. If we thought of it too much, there might be an air raid and the vessel would leave to return tomorrow, or, possibly, never. We preferred to watch, to stare, to think private thoughts, to wrestle with private doubts and worries. We preferred to suffer these final pangs alone, behind the walls of our individual minds, behind the moats of privacy.

The afternoon grew late.

The sun drifted toward the Matanikau River on a journey we had observed for all the months we had been on this island. We knew it still shone on Japanese, lurking in the jungles, as starved and gaunt as we. But this was no longer our problem. We had seized this island. In spite of all the Empire of Japan could do we had held it—in spite of it all, we had held it. We had held it with our bare hands, with our finger nails dug into its rotting soil. We had held it with our feet planted in the slime, and with our bellies against its hot pregnant sands. We held what we had

taken in the first days: the prized airfield, the land surrounding it—all that was worth possessing at this place. The enemy had not been able to drive us away; he had not been able to blast us off, or beat us into the earth with a constant lashing of gunpowder and steel.

We had proved here the Japanese were not invincible fighters, or supermen. We had proved they could not beat United States Marines; they could not beat Americans resolved to defeat them.

In proving this, the First Division, Fleet Marine Force, United States Marine Corps, had changed the face of the Pacific war. Guadalcanal had become the symbol of victory; it was the turning point in history; it was the moment when the eyes of Victory turned from the enemy and looked upon America.

A Higgins boat came. It pressed against the sand of the beach. Our squad was called. We struggled to our feet and walked through the sand. We climbed over the side, fell into the boat and stood to lean against its wood to lighten the weight of our possessions.

I had promised my father to bring him enough hides to make a yellow rug. But I had not kept this youthful contract. Instead, I had three rocks, small rocks, from the island in my pack. I had a rock from the Lunga River that changed to green when it was wet. I had a piece of coral from the sea. The third rock was from the Matanikau River. A rock from each extremity of our lines on Guadalcanal, and one from the sea. I thought bringing back to him a part of this island would please him. So, I had these rocks in my pack.

We waited in the sun. There was no surf, just little ripples touching the sand of the beach and dissolving into wet spots.

Occasionally, we searched the sky. It was a habit. We heard no motors. Finally, the engine of the Higgins boat began its song. It backed from the beach, scraping over the sand that had held it. It circled, headed into the channel toward the ship.

The Higgins boat drifted up to the vessel. We reached for the landing net and began our climb. Our heavy packs pulled us away from the ship's side as we moved upward. We were very

weak. We clung to the rope with all our strength, knuckles white, and moved slowly, painfully upward. At long last, we reached the rail, pushed over it as sailors reached down to help us by pulling on our pack straps, and with a deep, abiding sense of thanksgiving we placed our feet on the steel deck.

This was an old friend, this ship; it was the *Hunter Liggett*, the same transport that had brought us here four months and eight days ago. We remarked on this and wondered at it. We felt it was a good omen; we felt it would get us safely out of these dangerous waters so often frequented by Japanese submarines and warships. We had discussed so often the irony of getting killed after leaving Guadalcanal—possibly by falling off the gangplank in San Francisco—that now it worried us. We were anxious to get under way, now that we were aboard.

We found our bunks. Here we placed our heavy packs. We bathed in the hot, steaming fresh water showers—a luxury aboard transports reserved for troops so filthy their odor cannot be tolerated by the crew, and as recognition of a job well done. After we bathed, we went on deck.

The sun was low on the horizon. The island looked humid, dark. We knew what the Army soldiers there were doing; we felt a sorrow for them, as if they had been cheated in some brutal way. Indeed, we knew they had been cheated; they had the short end of the stick. We watched Guadalcanal in silence; stared at it in wonder; it was a dream, a nightmare; it was not real. We gazed at the coconut trees, followed the curve of Cape Esperance, bade Savo Island goodbye and watched the sun balance on the edge of the sea.

Trenton found me at the rail. "They're givin' away ice cream in the galley," he informed me excitedly.

"Are they crazy?" I asked, startled at the thought.

"They think we had it rough. We've returned from the dead. They want to feed us!"

We went below and got our cups of ice cream, small round paper cups of vanilla frozen to a cast-iron hardness, and a cardboard spoon. We sat on the deck right there, and opened



the cups. The ice cream was very beautiful. We ate it with slow, savoring bites, scraping a spoonful at a time off the melting surface of the ice cream. As we ate, the ship began to move. We could feel the vibration through the deck upon which we sat.

"All we need to do now is get through Torpedo Junction," Trenton said. Torpedo Junction was a haunt of enemy subs. Its floor was paved with shipping of both sides.

"I hope we make it." I scraped ice cream with the little spoon.

"We got destroyers . . . I saw two."

"They'll get us out." I couldn't believe anything else.

We scraped the bottom of the ice cream cups. We sat, looking at the containers, reading the sides. We were very full. Our stomachs had shrunk. Very little made us very full.

There was a blow against the deck. It was much like a padded baseball bat hitting against the steel upon which we sat. The blow was repeated. Two sailors ran by, rushed up the ladder toward topside. The sailor who had given out ice cream fled his sanctuary and disappeared.

"What the hell?" Trenton grunted.

Another sailor came into view and began to cross our front.

"What's the rush?" I yelled.

"They're droppin' depth charges!" he cried over his shoulder as he hit the ladder and vanished.

Another blow vibrated our seat on the deck.

"Let's move out!" Trenton suggested.

"You bet!" I answered. "Where are the foxholes?"

We rushed upward and on deck. We could see nothing. The thumps ceased. The night was very black; the air was sweet and warm and clean. We got our blankets and searched the deck.

I found a nice spot near a vent. I rolled in my blanket. The ship pitched and rolled gently. I drifted into sleep. It was the first comfortable night I had had in a long, long time.

It was December 15, 1942.

I had been in the Marine Corps fifteen months and twelve days.

We were delivered to Brisbane, Australia, as weak skeletons. More than five thousand of us—or about twenty-five per cent of those who returned from battle—had malaria of one kind or another, with new cases appearing daily. Besides these parasites floating in our bloodstreams, many Marines were covered with a mold of one kind or another, with Guadalcanal rot being the most dramatic. All of us were haggard, emaciated, and on the borderline of complete exhaustion of mind and body.

We staggered off the *Hunter Liggett* and were loaded on trucks which moved us into a dank glade miles from the nearest town. Here we found an abandoned tent camp which had no water fit for drinking, no post exchange, no recreational facilities, and no food in the mess hall.

"What did I tell you?" I said to Trenton who was a picture of disgust. "Didn't I tell you they probably had found a camp in a swamp somewhere—or else, they'd just found a swamp and we'd have to build the damned camp? Look around you. Just look. You don't have to lift your little finger. The tents are all up and all you got to do is sack in."

"Damn if I'll put up with it!" Trenton rubbed his cheek on his dungaree sleeve.

"What you goin' to do?"

"Puke all over it," he said quietly.

This sounded reasonable at the time.

The major came up.

"You are under quarantine. Nobody is to leave this area for ten days." He walked away looking very unhappy, his mustache frayed-looking and drooping.

"We ought to just walk through and puke on everything we see," Trenton growled.

"Here you are back in a civilized place and you are bitchin' before you have set foot good. Can't the Corps do anything to please you. Where's your manners?" Gleason said.

"I ain't paid to be happy," Trenton replied.

I looked at Gleason's back. It was covered with insects. I rubbed my hands over his shoulders to knock them off. They hummed angrily. Mosquitoes.

"Your back is covered with mosquitoes," I told him. The place I had cleared was covered again.

"You ought to see your back," he said.

"Knock 'em off."

He tried, dusting his hand back and forth across my back, but as soon as he finished, the mosquitoes returned. They formed a mat. They stood wing-to-wing.

"They go in swarms . . . I never seen anything like it," Gleason observed.

"There's been enough killin' . . . let 'em alone," Trenton said.

We spent Christmas in this miserable camp in the wilderness among the mosquitoes. Our mail had not caught up with us—in fact, I received my Christmas presents the following July—and we languished among beer kegs and before plates of mutton. We had found that farmers traveled a nearby road with milk carts. They stopped and we bought milk from them, and we stood by the carts and drank as much as we could hold. It was a heavenly nectar.

Details were sent to town and they returned with kegs of beer. This brought encouragement, for we drank it by the canteen cupfuls, passing out, or becoming ill, or suffering blinding headaches because we were anemic.

But this godforsaken hole was too much even for Marine Corps standards of swamp life, and the order was issued for the entire First Division to be moved to Melbourne on the southern coast of Australia. To this end, we went aboard the *West Point*—the *SS America* in peacetime—the largest passenger ship owned by the United States at that time.

The First Marines climbed aboard impressed by the size of the ship, for the decks towered high above the docks, and we cast off for Melbourne. The food was good, the ship roomy; we watched the ocean and enjoyed the clean, fresh, stimulating salt air.

Orders had come through for six hundred NCOs and officers to be transferred back to the United States as instructors and as elements to be mixed in with new divisions being activated.

This had been the subject of much speculation in the final days at Brisbane and continued to be a topic of conversation aboard the *West Point*.

The orders had been an unexpected turn of events. It was too wonderful to believe. I doubted if I would be among the chosen few. I felt lucky enough just to be alive and off Guadalcanal. It would be too much to expect to go home, though I very much desired the trip.

All of us knew the division would not be able to fight for months. Replacements would have to arrive, units be reorganized, old hands rested, and then weeks of retraining. We would rather retrain in the United States, so we waited for the news.

On the trip to Melbourne, the list was posted. Most of the NCOs of our unit were included, only communications men were denied the prize. They were needed in Australia. Those of us assigned to the States were to remain aboard the *West Point*, as we would return on it. The ship would be in Melbourne for a few days while cargo was loaded, then take off without escort for San Francisco. It had such high speed it didn't bother with escort, and, of course, the faster it could move, the better we liked it. It was a fine arrangement. I was exceedingly glad.

We sighted our landfall in the mid-morning hours, and after what seemed like a very long time we eased to the dock at Melbourne. As the *West Point* drifted to the dockside, an Australian military band struck up the *Marine Hymn*. The music had a particular meaning for us, for it sounded very much like home—like Parris Island, like Verona and New River. It lifted our spirits, but at the same time, it made us feel self-conscious, too.

As the sailors made the lines fast to the piling, we threw packs of cigarettes at the dock. We lined the rails—all of us, the majority of the First Marine Division.

The pier itself, a long stretch of heavy timbers fitted together to make a street of wood, was empty. The Australian band was in a warehouse entrance on the other side of the pier. As we gazed upon the dock, intent upon the work of the sailors, an officer walked slowly to the middle of the pier until he stood in its center, alone. There were stars on his shoulders. He stood

quietly, and leaned back, and looked up at us. It was General Vandegrift, the Marine who had led us, who had shared our suffering, our dangers, our triumphs.

He stood there alone, and looked up at us, a small figure, it seemed, far below.

A roar like that of a violent sea, a deafening roar from thousands of throats went up to greet him—a long, rolling roar of sound that thundered against the sky above us and crashed and echoed about us.

The general stood alone before us. He looked up at us and waved his greeting. He had come to meet us; to welcome us here. There were cheers. The great roar of sound grew once again to shatter the peace of Melbourne.

General Vandegrift stood a lone figure small against the great ship before him, but even from the distance that separated us, we could see that this spontaneous outburst from his men had touched him.

He stood motionless on this sweep of dock as the cheers pounded him. He was a Marine. A Marine who fought alongside his men, and whose men would fight alongside him—anywhere.

This was the substance of the victory at Guadalcanal. This was the secret: this leadership, this affection, this respect between men.

In the early hours of the morning, we saw our country.

We stood at the rails as the *West Point* moved along the coast. The fifteen hundred Australian pilots who were with us—bound for England to fight the Nazis—joined us, as excited as we were, for this is a fabled land.

The ship slowed, as ships do near port, and seemed to creep through the waves. Then, finally, there stretched before us the Golden Gate Bridge, magnificent, beautiful, graceful, and strong. We passed under it, looking up at its height, and moved slowly by Alcatraz. The tugs met us to guide this huge ship to dock.

We watched every move. We drank in the sight of the city—

of San Francisco, and of Oakland, and our hearts were filled with gladness.

The *West Point* drifted to the dock. Great ropes were cast out from it, and made fast. The gangplank slid from our vessel.

There was no one to meet us. There were no bands, no dancing girls. No mayors or governors or politicians of minor rank. No wives, no sweethearts. No reporters, no cameramen. The pier was deserted.

We could not have cared less. We had received the greatest gift of all; we had known the greatest treasure, for we were alive, and sane, and we were home.

Among us there were those who wept . . . and we were not ashamed.

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Carol White, general manager of the Cherokee Historical Association, Cherokee, North Carolina, convinced me as we were surrounded by Indians one night on lands belonging to the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, the only way to produce this book was to sit down and write it. This logic was so clear and so final, I followed it.

Mrs. Margie Douthit of Bryson City, North Carolina, secretary to Mr. White, was a great help in the beginning.

Mrs. G. W. Swanson of Victoria, Texas, my mother-in-law, has for many years expressed a desire to see a book by me, as has my mother.

It would be a break with tradition if I refused to take any

blame for the errors, omissions, misstatements, and faults which may be contained in this book, so I accept this heavy burden.

The First Marine Division of which I write existed in the form I knew it only from November 1941 through January 1943, when I—along with many others—was transferred to other duties in the Fleet Marine Force. The First Division, after almost a year of rest and retraining in Australia, made assaults against the enemy at Cape Gloucester, Peleliu, and Okinawa. Not only was it the first Marine division to leave for foreign service after the war began, it was the last Marine division to return to the United States after the war ended. The First Marine Division received Presidential Unit Citations for “outstanding gallantry and determination” and for “Extraordinary heroism” for its campaigns in Guadalcanal, Peleliu, and Okinawa Shima. And the Eleventh Marine Regiment was commended by the Secretary of the Navy for “outstanding heroism” in action against enemy Japanese forces at Cape Gloucester, New Britain.

After leaving the First Marine Division in Australia, I was returned to California, where I was stationed at Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, California, for almost two years. At the end of this time I was sent to Quantico, Virginia; New River, North Carolina, and, then, to Maui, Hawaiian Islands, where I began service with the Fourth Marine Division, FMF. With this division, I participated in the Iwo Jima assault and campaign. The Fourth Marine Division received a Presidential Unit Citation for the Iwo Jima assault.

If this book stirs young men to desire to serve their country in the world's finest military organization, the United States Marine Corps, then I will be very proud. To those not so moved, I suggest they can become artisans in any other branch of the military.

T. GRADY GALLANT

*Chattanooga, Tennessee*









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